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## A Mid-Winter Journey across Siberia

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# FIVE THOUSAND MILES IN A SLEDGE

*A MID-WINTER JOURNEY ACROSS SIBERIA*

BY

LIONEL F GOWING



WITH 31 ILLUSTRATIONS BY C J. UREN, AND A MAP

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1889





**Dedicated**  
**TO THE MEMORY OF**  
**CHARLES JOSEPH UREN**

**Died September 17, 1887**



## PREFACE

A RESIDENCE for even so brief a period as four years in a distant land suffices to imbue one with a wholesome contempt for the globe-trotter who imagines that a stay of a few weeks in a strange country, or a hasty journey across it, is enough to enable him to write an exhaustive account of that country and to pose ever afterwards as an authority upon its constitution and mode of government, and upon the social and intellectual condition of its people. A sledge journey across Asiatic Russia, undertaken by one whose knowledge of the language is barely extensive enough to enable him to make his wants known, does not qualify him to pass an opinion upon the administration of the Siberian provinces or upon the commercial and industrial future of a tract of country covering an area considerably greater than the whole of Europe. This book pretends, therefore, to be nothing more than a truthful record of a journey in which no English author has preceded the present writer. Other English travellers have, it is true, traversed the same ground, or almost the same ground, in summer, and have written then

experiences, but Siberia under frost and snow differs so vastly from Siberia in the aspects in which Dr. Lansdell, for instance, has described it, that an apology for the present account is less needed than it might otherwise be. As a record of a journey under conditions utterly strange to most English readers it is hoped that it will not be found without interest, though the illness and subsequent death of the comrade, from whose keen observation, as well as from his facile pencil, the author had anticipated great and valuable assistance, have undoubtedly robbed it of much of its interest.

But although the author has tried to avoid touching upon questions in regard to which a superficial observation might have led him into error, there is one subject on which it is impossible for him to be altogether silent. 'What is the truth about the convict system?' 'Is the fate of the exiles as terrible as has been represented?' These are the questions with which one who has recently been in Siberia is assailed on every hand. And since such knowledge as the author has been enabled to glean on these subjects has been entirely gained at second hand, it is perhaps better that the question should be dealt with here than in the body of the work.

In 1879 the Rev. Dr. Henry Lansdell travelled through Siberia, armed with a letter from the Minister of the Interior which opened all the prison doors to him. On his return to England he published an account of his travels

in which he completely whitewashed the Russian authorities and expressed the conviction that, 'on the whole, if a Russian exile behaves himself decently well, he may in Siberia be more comfortable than in many, and as comfortable as in most, of the prisons of the world.' In 1885 Mr. George Kennan, accompanied by Mr. George A. Frost, started on an expedition to Siberia for the express purpose of 'making a careful study of the exile system.' The judgment he had at that time formed was, he tells us, that the system had been 'greatly misrepresented by prejudiced writers.' So he informed Mr. Vlangali, the then Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs. Since then Mr. Kennan has published to the world some of the results of his investigations. And 'if,' he says, 'the opinions which I now hold differ from those which I expressed to Mr. Vlangali in 1885, it is not because I was then insincere, but because my views have since been changed by an overwhelming mass of evidence.'

Which opinion is correct—that of Dr. Lansdell, or that of Mr. George Kennan? The present author can claim perfect impartiality on the question. So far as the disputants, if they may be called so, are concerned, his personal sympathies would be with Dr. Lansdell, through whose kindness in providing him with a general introduction he made many valued friends during his journey, and the unvaried kindness and courtesy which he received from Russian officials and people would have been enough to dismiss from his

mind any prejudice, had it existed, against Russia or the Russian Government. But such information as he and his companion were able to gather was totally opposed to the opinions of Dr. Lansdell and in accord with the conclusions to which the later traveller has come. The very difference in the methods of the two men and their fitness for the task of investigation is sufficient of itself to raise a strong presumption as to the side on which truth lies. The one fact that Dr. Lansdell was ignorant of the language and was compelled, in regard to everything which he did not actually see with his own eyes, to rely almost entirely upon such information as the Government officials chose to supply him with, renders his account *prima facie* of infinitely less value than that of Mr. Kennan, whose familiarity with Russian enabled him to gather his information from innumerable sources.

The present author's direct experience on the subject is confined to the meeting of a few convoys of exiles on the road, and to the casual inspection of the outside walls of several prisons and *étapes*. But he was able to gather the opinions of foreign residents in Siberia as to the accuracy of Dr. Lansdell's account. There were but two, it is true, who appeared willing to open their minds quite freely on the point, most of the others being more or less closely connected with the Russian administrative system. But these two were both men to whose extensive knowledge of Asiatic

Russia Dr. Lansdell was indebted for many of the facts related in 'Through Siberia,' and they are both emphatically of the opinion that the learned doctor had been imposed upon. 'Don't you think,' asked Mr. Uien of one of them, 'that things were "set up" for Dr. Lansdell in the prisons—that they "saw him coming"?' 'Undoubtedly,' was the reply. 'Still,' remarked the present writer, the stories which used to be related in England of the sufferings of political prisoners in Siberia, were doubtless to some extent exaggerated?' 'Hardly at all, it would hardly be possible to exaggerate them,' was the rejoinder.

In his more recent work on 'Russian Central Asia,' Dr. Lansdell has replied at great length to those who argued that he had been deceived by the Russian prison authorities, who had been warned beforehand of his visits. He admits, however, that two of his friends living in Siberia and Russia shared in this belief. One of these he mentions by name, the other may possibly have been one of the two Siberian residents referred to above. But the opinion strongly impressed upon the mind of the present writer—an opinion which was completely shared by his companion of the voyage—is that although Dr. Lansdell has dispelled some erroneous ideas and disproved some false stories in regard to Russia's treatment of her prisoners, political and social, he has been misled into presenting a picture of Siberian prison management which is far too



roseate-hued, and which does infinitely more credit to the Russian Government than is deserved. Having first heard when in the heart of Siberia of the great and noble work in which Mr. George Kennan had then been so recently engaged, the author cannot omit the opportunity of bearing testimony to the high opinion entertained there as to the unsparing pains which Mr. Kennan had taken to arrive at the truth, and as to the value his work was likely to have in placing before American and English readers a reliable account of the sufferings of Siberian prisoners.

Since the completion of the journey here narrated a work has been projected which, when completed, will render summer travelling in Siberia far easier than in the past. The connection of Tomsk and Stretensk by rail on either side with the Baikal Sea, and the building of a further railway from Lake Khanka to Vladivostok, will, if completed, enable the traveller to cross the two entire continents of Europe and Asia by steam. Undoubtedly it will, for both commercial and strategic purposes, be a great and important work. But of its prospective commercial value some immensely exaggerated estimates have been formed. It has even been spoken of as a formidable rival to the Canadian Pacific Railway. But when it is remembered that for half the year the navigation of the rivers is stopped by ice, and that when open the Amur is so shallow that the light-draught steamers which ply on its surface are not unfrequently compelled to

stop for want of water, and when one recollects the frequent embarkations and disembarkations which will still be necessary, it must be conceded that it will take more than these connecting links of railway to render this a very serviceable route for passengers and cargo to and from the Far East. For the tourist on pleasure bent, the winter journey by sledge will still, with all its hardships and inconveniences, have something to recommend it over the mosquitoes, the heat, the dirt, and the discomfort of Siberian steamboat travelling as it has been described by summer voyagers.

The author has endeavoured to maintain a reasonable amount of uniformity in the transliteration of Russian names, but the anomalies of English spelling render it difficult to indicate the proper pronunciation without having recourse to an elaborate system of phonetics which would be out of place in a book of this kind. If, however, the reader will pronounce the letter 'u' like 'oo' in boot, and 'i' like 'ee' in feet, or 'i' in 'fit,' and will give to the other letters their common English sound, 'ch' being pronounced as in 'chat,' 'zh' like 's' in 'vision,' and 'kh' like the Scottish guttural in 'loch,' he will not go so very far wrong.

L F G.

HAMPSTEAD    *October, 1889*

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# FIVE THOUSAND MILES IN A SLEDGE

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY

The conception of the idea—A host of advisers—Encouragements and warnings—Our forerunners in Siberian travel—Mr Michie—Professor Milne—The Western Union Extension Telegraph Company—Mr Kennan—The Rev Dr Lansdell—M Russell Killough—M Meignan—Mr Thomas Duff—Farewell to Shanghai—Nagasaki—Fusan—Gensan

It was midday, and we were seated round the tiffin-table when the idea was first mooted. The swinging punkah overhead tempered with a gentle breeze the fierce moist heat of a Shanghai August day, and the white glare outside only reached us mellowed and subdued by filtration through the reed blinds surrounding the verandah. 'Jack,' the tall, bulky, beaming-faced Chinese head-boy, was busily employed in the dispensation of cooling liquors, and we were one and all arrayed in the loose white garments which form the summer costumes of exiles in the Far East. But in spite of all that the arts of civil-

sation could do to mitigate the rigour of a sub-tropical sun, the idea of gliding through endless tracts of ice and snow, with the thermometer at unheard-of depths below zero, proved singularly pleasing and attractive at that moment

The fortunate man of business or merchant's clerk whose lot is cast in Shanghai, the gay metropolis of the Far East, sometimes assumes a tone of pity for his less favoured comrades who are struggling along in the keen race for existence in the Old Country. I have heard many an old China resident declare that Shanghai is the best place in the world to live in, and that nothing less than the award of a double first prize in the Manila Lottery, or some other semi-miraculous chance which should make him the possessor of a handsome fortune, would induce him to take up his residence permanently in England. My future *camarade de voyage*, Mr Uien, of the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company, though by no means an old resident, was strongly imbued with this unpatriotic notion. 'England,' he was wont to declare, 'is a capital country to live out of and boast about,' but even he had sufficient love for his native land to look forward with eager anticipation to a coming twelvemonth's furlough, which would enable him to pay a temporary visit to Old England. For my part, I had determined, after a four years' residence in Shanghai, to break through the fascinations of Far Eastern life before they obtained too strong a hold on me; and on this sultry August day in 1885 we were discussing the respective merits of the various routes from China to

England My future comrade declared that he had for some time entertained the idea of making his way home through Siberia in the middle of winter, but unfortunately he had never been able to find anyone mad enough to accompany him, and he had consequently abandoned the notion. I at once stepped into the breach, and within five minutes the journey was, in our minds, an accomplished fact.

Our friends round the tiffin-table smiled knowingly, and insinuated that as the year declined and the days grew cooler, so also would our ardour. Certainly, in the midst of the wintry east winds which compensate the residents of Shanghai for the tropical heat of summer, the projected journey did not bear quite so pleasant an aspect, but, nevertheless, our purpose endured. Various obstacles necessitated our postponing its execution till the winter of 1886, but in the meantime we consulted all the authorities we could find on the subject, placed ourselves in communication with foreigners resident in Vladivostok, which we settled upon as the base of our journey, and generally perfected our plans. From the foreigners in Vladivostok to whom we obtained introductions we received the most kindly promises of assistance, and although from many friends in China we were overwhelmed with due warnings of the perilous nature of our projected enterprise, we were consoled by the reflection that the darkness of the pictures was generally in direct proportion to the ignorance of our informants in regard to everything connected with Siberian travel.

From the accounts of earlier travellers across Siberia we could obtain but little information to assist us in maturing our plans. During the last twenty or thirty years some half a dozen or more English residents in the Far East have made their way home through Northern Asia, and some two or three of these have placed their experiences upon record; but in nearly every case they have made their way through Peking, across the Mongolian desert, by Uiga, Kiakhta, and Verkhne Udinsk to the Baikal Sea, and have thus been unable to give at first hand any description whatever of travel in Eastern Siberia. Moreover, they had nearly all very naturally chosen the summer for their journey, and the conditions of winter and summer travelling in Siberia are so vastly different that this rendered the accounts of our predecessors almost entirely valueless to us.

One of the first English residents in China to whom the idea of making his way homeward by the northern route seems to have occurred was Mr Alexander Michie, still, I believe, a resident in the Far East, who published a description of his journey in 1864, and fifteen years later Professor Milne, now celebrated for his important seismological researches in Japan, undertook a similar exploit, an account of which he subsequently read before the Asiatic Society of Japan. In 1882, while on my way to China, Professor Milne and I happened to be fellow-voyagers on board the French mail steamer *Orus*, and from him I first learnt something of the kind of adventure which voyagers in Siberia have to expect. At that time I had as little idea

of travelling across Northern Asia as of making a journey to the moon, but three years later, when the adventure was suggested to me, the professor's descriptions recurred to my memory, though how far they influenced me in my decision to attempt the journey I have been unable to determine.

Since Captain John Dundas Cochrane's account of his adventurous pedestrian tour in Siberia in the early part of this century, a number of works on Northern Asiatic travel have appeared from the pens of French, American, and English writers. In 1865 an expedition started from America for the purpose of surveying the north of Siberia and erecting an overland telegraph line from Behring's Straits to Europe, to be connected by a short cable across the straits with a similar land line stretching from Alaska to New England. The enterprise was abandoned two years later owing to the success of the rival scheme for laying an ocean cable across the Atlantic, but several of the hardy spirits who volunteered for this hazardous expedition have since published in America thrilling accounts of their adventures, by far the best being from the pen of Mr. George Kennan. Not one of them, however, has described at any length the features of an ordinary midwinter journey over the great highway of Asiatic Russia.

Of the comparatively few English and French travellers who have crossed the western boundary of Asia, those who have penetrated to Eastern Siberia could easily be counted on the fingers of a single hand. Foremost among them is the Rev. Dr. Henry Lansdell, who in 1879 crossed Siberia

from the Ural to the Pacific as the pioneer of missionary work among the Russian exiles. The outcome of this journey, Dr. Lansdell's 'Through Siberia,' is undoubtedly the fullest and most accurate description of the country which has yet appeared. But his also was a summer trip, and the only two detailed descriptions of post-sledging along the great Northern Asiatic route which have been published are from the pens of French travellers. The first of these, M. Henry Russell-Killough, left Petersburg in November 1858, intending to pass out of Asiatic Russia at Kiakhta and make his way through China. He reached Peking in safety, but, much to his disgust, was prevented from proceeding farther, and made to retrace his steps over the Mongolian desert. By the time he regained the Siberian highway the winter was nearly at an end, and he continued his journey by water, steaming the whole way along the Shilka and Amur to Nikolaevsk, whence he proceeded to Japan. His travels have never been translated into English. The other winter voyager is M. Victor Meignan, who left Paris on October 25, 1873, and arrived in Irkutsk in the middle of the following February. The fatigues of the journey having affected his health he remained some weeks in Irkutsk, had a dangerous passage in his sledge over the Baikal, owing to a thaw having set in, and crossed Mongolia to Peking and Tientsin in the spring. An English translation of M. Meignan's account of his journey appeared some four years ago, and only reached Shanghai after our trip had been decided upon. It contained the first authoritative opinion which we had

then been able to obtain as to the advantages and disadvantages of such a journey as that we proposed to make. In concluding the account of his travels M. Meignan says •

‘My readers, perhaps, will wonder what could have induced me to have undertaken so wearisome a journey : I had imagined the bright side of it only then, but now I have seen the other I can advise them not to follow my example ; for though there are many novel, grand, and striking scenes of nature, accompanied with much exciting adventure, still they are not to be enjoyed in so vigorous a climate as that of Siberia in winter without incurring much hardship, and even a certain exposure to a considerable share of danger ’

This was not very encouraging But we did not allow ourselves to become dispirited, especially as we subsequently discovered that M Meignan’s views were not held by all who had shared his experiences Mr. Thomas Duff, a British merchant in China, who made the winter journey a quarter of a century ago or more, but who has never written an account of his travels, described it to us as one prolonged enjoyable picnic, and assured us that nothing but family ties prevented him from at once starting off to repeat the experiment In this conflict of evidence we resolved to decide the question for ourselves, and on October 30, 1886, having exchanged parting greetings with our friends, some of whom bade us a mournful farewell in the firm belief that we were doomed to ornament the steppes of Northern Asia with our frozen corpses, we

embarked on board the Japanese steamer *Yokohama Maru*, and were soon gliding down the Huangpu River to the broad mouth of the Yangtze-Kiang

As we steamed slowly down towards the Woosung Forts, the extensive Chinese batteries which guard the entrance to the river on which Shanghai stands, a line of signal flags was suddenly hoisted at the little telegraph station where the submarine cables are landed, and the captain, directing his glasses to this quarter, informed us that the message read: 'Good-bye, pleasant voyage.' It was our last communication with the land which for four years had been my home. A few hours later we had emerged from the mouth of the great Yangtze River, and were bucking heavily against a choppy sea outside. On some of us the motion soon began to have its effect. Captain Haswell, of the *Yokohama Maru*, has deservedly gained the reputation of keeping the best table to be found in any steamer plying in the China and Japan waters—and this is no small compliment, for they know how to live in the Far East, but nevertheless, during the short passage to Nagasaki, there were many of us who felt disinclined to put his reputation to the test

On the morning of November 1, some forty-four hours after leaving Shanghai, we entered the lovely harbour of Nagasaki, with the pretty little Japanese town nestling at the feet, and villa residences of the foreign merchants and consuls dotting the slopes, of the beautifully tinted hills which surround it on every side. Here my comrade and I transferred ourselves and our belongings to the *Takachiku*



*Maru*, another fine steamer of the Japanese mail line, plying between Nagasaki, Corea, and Vladivostok. A sixteen hours' run brought us to the town of Fusan, one of the three newly opened ports of the little kingdom of Corea. The foreign settlement, its population consisting of half a dozen Europeans and a few hundred Japanese, offered but few attractions to us, and we accordingly occupied the brief period of our stay in scouring Deer Island—an islet at the entrance to the harbour—in search of game. We caught sight in the distance of a single specimen of the quadrupeds who have given their name to the island, but we did not succeed in bagging him, and returned to the ship with only a few quail to compensate us for our failure.

The next morning at daylight we were once more under way, and the day after at noon we anchored in the pretty harbour of Gensan, the most northerly of the Korean open ports. The crazy Korean boats, riveted with wood and having not a scrap of iron in their composition, are only fit for discharging cargo in a perfectly calm sea accompanied by fine weather, and the absence of this favourable conjunction of circumstances occasioned us a three days' delay.

## CHAPTER II

## COREA

The opening of the Hermit Kingdom—Political crises—Chemulpo—A ride to the capital—Ma po—Seoul—Pak tung—The massacre of 1882—Interview with a Corean prince—A night ride from Seoul—Port Hamilton—Gensan—Arrival at Vladivostok.

It was not our first visit to Corea. Mr. Uien and I had been companions in an expedition to the Hermit Kingdom just twelve months before. The country had then not long been exposed to the gaze of curious foreigners, and the steamer *Ashington*, which carried us, was, in fact, the first British merchant ship which had ever entered the eastern port of Gensan or Yuensan.

But Corea had already passed through several political crises since her entrance into the comity of nations, and she was just at the height of another at the time of our visit. Herr von Mollendorff, the adviser and Foreign Minister of the Corean king, whose royal master had ennobled his ancestors for several generations back in order to render him eligible for an office which only an hereditary nobleman might occupy, had just fallen into disgrace. He had been accused of attempting to throw Corea into the arms of Russia, and although he had not then left the

country, as he was afterwards compelled to do, he had been relieved of his offices as Foreign Minister and Inspector-General of Customs. England had only a few months before seized on the islands surrounding Port Hamilton, and the Russian scare was still at its height. A year before, the establishment of a regular postal system had been frustrated on the day of its inauguration by an *émeute* and a general massacre. But this had not altogether checked enterprise, for the *Ashington* bore to Chemulpo, the port of Seoul, all the machinery for setting up a mint; and on the very day of our arrival a telegraph line was opened from the port to the capital.

The port of Chemulpo is prettily situated, with verdure-clad hills rising on either side of it, and distant peaks of greater altitude beyond. The town is rather Japanese than Korean, and the consulate of the Land of the Rising Sun is by far its most imposing building, quite eclipsing the homes of the representatives of Great Britain and China. On one side of the little town the slopes of the hill were dotted over with Japanese gravestones, while on the opposite cliff three stones marked the resting-places of two young officers and a sailor of the American navy, and formed the commencement of a foreign city of the dead. Very pretty views of the harbour and the surrounding country were obtained from the cliffs, and with its bracing and pleasant climate, and its pretty situation, there seemed a fair prospect of Chemulpo becoming some day a formidable rival to Chefoo as a summer health-resort for residents in China. Its sole natural drawback is the extra-

ordinary rise and fall of the tide, which leaves at low water a great waste of muddy sand stretching along the little bay.

All the sight-seeing that could be done in the little port, with its score or so of Europeans and its few hundred Japanese and Koreans, was soon exhausted. The men, in their long robes, their heads covered by the broad-brimmed stove-pipe hat of open-worked horsehair, through which could be seen the knot of hair bunched on top of the head, had been familiar objects to us in China. Another form of hat which appeared to be very commonly worn was even more striking in point of size. This was a huge covering of coarse straw matting, almost completely hiding the head and shoulders of the wearer from view, and looking far more suitable for roofing a haystack than a human being. These hats, we were told, formed part of the trappings and the suits of native male Korean wear, but as about every third man had thus extinguished himself, it struck us that if all these men were in mourning the death-rate of Chemulpo must be alarmingly high.

Seoul, the capital of the 'Land of Morning Calm,' is some thirty odd miles from its seaport. At present there are two ways of making the journey. One may pass the hours squatting cross-legged in a seatless sedan chair, or one can ride a specimen of the Korean pack-horse, an undersized, stiff-jointed pony, which only occasionally quickens its ordinary slow walking pace to a peculiarly disagreeable shambling trot, a very brief continuance of which is almost sufficient to jolt one's every bone from its socket.

We chose the latter alternative, and at seven o'clock on

the morning after our arrival at Chemulpo our little party of three were astride three sorry ponies, whose clumsy native saddles had been removed and replaced by three of English manufacture kindly placed at our service by foreign residents at the port. Behind us stode the three owners of the animals, carrying their heavy Korean saddles, as well as all our wraps and provisions, these men having undertaken to provide us with ponies and walk the whole thirty miles with their burdens for a sum in Korean 'cash' which would yield them less than eighteenpence a head.

Here and there we passed little villages of thatched mud huts, with scores of children running about in their summer costume, consisting of one little white jacket, open in front, and reaching not quite down to the waist. Numbers of caravans met us on the road, some with long lines of magnificent bulls carrying huge burdens, which often almost hid the beasts from sight. The men—villagers as well as travellers—all appeared well dressed, women were rarely seen at all. We saw not a single beggar, a pleasing relief after an experience of travelling in China. Every man was provided with a long straight pipe and a pouch of tobacco, and all we saw tended to confirm what we were afterwards told at the capital—that, although there is an entire absence of the wealthy merchants who form so important a class in the Celestial Empire, the abject poverty which stares one in the face in every part of China is almost equally unknown. Everywhere, too, the people were very courteous and kindly disposed towards foreigners, and none of the petty insults and annoyances which are

inseparable from a journey in the interior of China were experienced

Some hours' slow plodding brought us to a vast expanse of loose sand, beyond which a line of junk-masts told us that at last we were nearing the river, and a cluster of huts beyond the junks buoyed us up with a false hope that the suburbs of Seoul were at length in sight. This, however, turned out to be the little river port of Ma-po—a good hour's journey from the capital at our then rate of progress. It was here, on this stretch of sand, that, less than twenty years before, Bishop Berneux and three other French missionaries were put to death with revolting tortures by command of a prince whose return to Corea after a long period of exile was at that very moment expected—the Dai In Kun, father of his Corean Majesty.

At the river a large ferry-boat was ready to receive us. It contained already some two dozen Coreans and a fine large bull; but we managed to find space for our three ponies, our mafoos, or horsemen, and ourselves, and the whole miscellaneous cargo was soon ferried across.

The bamboo, slung across the shoulder, common to China and Japan, is unknown in Corea for carrying weights, everything is borne upon the back. The frame on which the burden is rested is a simple device, formed principally of two long naturally forked pieces of wood, fastened side by side, so that when this framework is strapped on the shoulders two branches of the forks stick out nearly at right angles to the back and form a convenient ledge on which to deposit the bundle. One of our fellow-passengers on the ferry-boat was

provided with a frame of this kind on which rested a fine fat pig, with his back towards the ground, and his feet tied together and pointing towards the heavens. The Irishman doubtless considers himself superior in civilisation to the Korean, but I believe Paddy, though his difficulties in getting the pig home from market are proverbial, never yet rose to the sublime stroke of genius of strapping the animal to his back.

The little town of Ma-po, the river port of Seoul, looks picturesque from the opposite side of the Han River, but the effect is destroyed when one gets into its narrow streets, with all the dirtiness and none of the quaintness of a Chinese town; the houses little better than thatched mud huts, and devoid of the glittering signboards and grotesque carvings which afford some slight compensation for the squalor and vile odours of the towns of the Celestial Empire. The shops generally showed a stock-in-trade which looked as if it might be bought up, with the goodwill of the business thrown in, for a very few pence. Chillies appeared to be the staple article of diet. More than one shop displayed no other wares, the red pods being piled in little heaps of half a dozen each on the pathway in front of the house. During our ride, too, we had often observed the roofs of distant houses gleaming a brilliant red in the sun, the hue proving on a nearer approach to be due to the chilli pepper pods spread out on the thatched roofs to dry. Pipe and tobacco shops were numerous, but we saw little else for sale beyond the bare necessities of life.

Passing over a little hill which faces the river, and on which the principal part of the town is situated, we found

ourselves in a pretty valley, surrounded on every side by hills of verdure and cultivated fields.

But we were in no condition to admire scenery. We had been travelling for about ten hours; our ponies were dead tired, and our goal was nowhere in sight. Our mafeos came to a halt, and seemed undecided as to their road. We could do but little in the way of urging them on, because our common vocabulary consisted of a single word—*Pak-tung*—the native name of the compound in Seoul for which we were bound—the compound in which were situated the headquarters of the Korean Customs Service, and the residence of Herr von Mollendoiff. It is true we could say *Pak-tung*. Like Mark Twain's American student in Germany who had learnt to say 'Zwei Glas,' we had 'got that solid.' But supposing our mafeos did not understand it? Supposing we pronounced the words wrongly, and they were conducting us to some village far in the interior with a name of similar sound? A little lunch of which we had partaken at the 'halfway house' seemed far back in the remote past; one of our party of three expressed his willingness to barter his pony and mafeo and all his companions' baggage—including a satchel of sketching apparatus with which the beauties and wonders of Corea were to be transferred to paper—all for a single draught of beer. Luckily for his comrades, the exchange was impossible, and there was nothing for it but to trudge wearily along behind our mafeos, who led the ponies up a steep stony watercourse, through which a tiny stream was running. It seemed incredible that this could be the



direct road from the river port to the metropolis and seat of government of an ancient kingdom nearly as large as Great Britain, but as we ascended, the long train of descending pack-horses and cattle, which nearly blocked the narrow path, told us we were approaching a busy town, and at length, when we reached the head of the watercourse, we saw in the distance the solid walls and well-built gate of the city of Seoul

With revived hopes we plodded on, till at length we stood before the city gate, a typical Chinese erection, with its name emblazoned on it in celestial characters. On either side of it stretched lofty well-preserved walls of solid masonry, and above was a double roof of curved tiles, with corners pointing heavenwards

But we were not yet at our journey's end. We trudged along through what seemed an endless succession of narrow, dirty, winding streets, till at length, when we felt convinced that we had faced every point of the compass at least half a dozen times since we entered the city, we arrived at a fine, straight, broad thoroughfare. It was the principal street of Seoul, leading from one of the city gates to the palace of the King. Shops of a slightly better class than those we had previously seen extended along its sides, and in front of these were stalls with petty wares exposed for sale. Among the customers around one of these stalls we saw a Korean lady with a coiffure which would have struck envy into the breast of many of her European sisters. It was plaited into an enormous chignon, beneath which the lady's face looked a mere pimple in point of size

Although loth to believe that even a Korean lady would endeavour to enhance her charms by artifice, we could not feel convinced that the hair was all her own. It seemed impossible that less than a dozen heads could have produced such a crop in a lifetime, and our suspicions were afterwards confirmed by foreign residents at the capital. It was, we were told, the proper head-dress for a lady of the Court.

A little later we entered a courtyard, and our eyes were cheered by the sight of a street lamp of foreign manufacture and a cart loaded with foreign furniture. We entered Pak-tung, paid off our cavalcade, and were soon snugly ensconced in a little bowery, which seemed scarcely less than an earthly paradise after our weary pilgrimage. We seemed to be surrounded by all the comforts of civilisation compressed into one little room, lined with book-cases containing a choice library, and prettily decorated with a profusion of nicknacks and rare works of art.

Cheered by the hearty welcome which we received, and splendidly reinvigorated after our thirsty march, we were soon in the compound admiring the view of the city which it afforded. The city walls stretched for miles over the hills, and inclosed within them were other walls, only less extensive, which surrounded the palace grounds, a mere glimpse of the palace roof and summer pavilion being obtainable above them. In another direction was the old palace, occupied by the King previous to the massacre of 1882, when the heir apparent, and his wife, and the chief Ministers of the Government were slaughtered, as

is believed, at the instigation of the King's father, the Dai In Kun, the leader of that Conservative party, which was inimical to the opening of the Hermit Kingdom to the foreigner.

Various accounts have been given of the origin of this massacre, which marked the entrance of Corea into the comity of nations, but I will give the story as I heard it from the lips of a Prince of the Royal House. The difficulty which culminated in this massacre, his Highness explained, speaking in Chinese through a gentleman who was kind enough to act as interpreter, had arisen in the first instance from the attempt of the Dai In Kun to usurp to himself powers which were vested in the Throne. The predecessor of his present Majesty died leaving no near relation to succeed him, and the choice then fell upon the now reigning King, then a boy of twelve years old. Parental authority is no less strongly insisted upon in Corea than in China, and, all Corean ethics thus compelling the young King to be obedient to his father, for years the sovereign sway was entirely in the hands of the Dai In Kun. As the King began to grow up to manhood, he began to perceive that his father's rule was anything but beneficent. The Prince was constantly performing in the name of the King acts of which his Majesty could not possibly approve, and finally these deeds culminated in the torturing and slaughter of some tens of thousands of Roman Catholic converts. Then at last the King rebelled against the parental authority. He pointed out to the Dai In Kun that although his duty towards his father

was great, his duty towards those over whom he—and not his father—had been appointed King was greater still. He proceeded to degrade some of the many corrupt and incapable men whom the Prince had appointed to high offices in the kingdom, and generally to assume to himself the active government of the country. The Dai In Kun, who had held almost undisputed sway for ten years, was not disposed to allow the power to slip away from him so easily, and the result of all this was the conspiracy and massacre of 1882, in which nearly all the principal advisers of the King in his new line of policy were put to death, and his Majesty was left almost helpless. The life of the Queen herself was threatened, but she managed with difficulty to escape; and at this juncture China sent ships and troops to his Majesty's assistance, and carried away the Dai In Kun as a prisoner of war. But he was now on his way back, and the Liberal party, to which the Prince, my informant, belonged, were in a state of trepidation.

On the morning after our arrival in the capital a telegram from Chemulpo announced the departure of the *Ashington* from Gensan early on the following day. We had therefore only time to take a short stroll round the city and visit a few shops before making our preparations for the return journey. As we entered the main street we saw coming towards us from the palace a long procession escorting a high official of the Court, who was borne aloft in an uncovered chair. The escort maintained a continuous yelling to announce to the world the approach of then

august master, but they marched in more orderly fashion than the rabble which usually composes a Chinese procession, and on the whole they presented a less ridiculous appearance. The official himself appeared to be habited in the ordinary Korean Court dress, which we had a better opportunity of examining on the person of a Court official who came more than once to Pak-tung during our short stay, bringing royal messages to Heri von Mollendoiff. His horseman head-dress had two wings or ears projecting horizontally from the back towards the right and left, very similar to those which may be seen in the portraits of ancient emperors of China. Around his waist was a stiff girdle, large enough to encircle two men of his size, and his embroidered robes were not of the cleanest. Altogether he presented very much the appearance of some of the characters one sees on a Chinese stage when an historical play is in progress, though he was decidedly too shabby for a respectable theatre.

The ponies of Seoul were markedly superior to those of Chemulpo, and we started away pretty briskly on the seaward road, our mafoos jogging merrily along after the ponies, undismayed by the dreary night march before them. Arrived in the middle of the watercourse, by which we had approached the city, we were temporarily stopped by a bull, laden with so huge a burden that he had become jammed tightly in between the houses on either side of the way. A continuous stream of pack-horses and cattle was winding along in each direction, and the jam threatened to get more and more serious, till by dint of much loud talking,

which convinced us—ignorant as we were of the language—that the Koreans are adepts in the art of imprecation, we managed to get clear. An hour brought us easily down to the river, and we had crossed the sandy plain in front of it, waded the two streams which wind through it, and reached the fair roadway before darkness descended.

Soon we reached a little house by the roadside, and the cavalcade came to a halt, while one of our mafoos hammered resultlessly at the door, till at length, losing patience, he smashed it open with his foot. An angry altercation ensued between the mafoos and those within, which lasted so long that our patience also became exhausted, and we induced the mafoo in charge of the baggage pony to continue the journey, leaving his companions behind. Gradually, as we proceeded on our way, escorted by the one mafoo, we heard the sound of angry voices growing fainter and fainter in the distance. We speculated on the cause of these remarkable proceedings, till one of our party reminded us of the American humorist's description of his cruise in a canal boat, during which the captain delayed the voyage while he went ashore to break up the 'grocery,' returning the next morning, battered but triumphant. The mafoos, he said, had doubtless called a halt while they went to break up a grocery. We accepted the explanation as satisfactory, and proceeded on our way, till we came to a fork in the road.

Our guide was evidently at fault, he could not be sure which was the proper course. Another halt was therefore made while he yelled to the mafoos in the rear. We

added our lung-power to his, but all was unavailing—the grocery was not yet demolished. There was nothing for it but to wait, and we sat there silently in the dark, our ponies quietly grazing, till we saw a light approaching in the distance. Our other mafoos, one of them carrying a lantern with a couple of inches of candle in it, soon loomed in sight. They pointed out the right course, and once more we proceeded on our way. The mafoos behind began to cheer the lonely ride with selections from some of the latest productions at the Royal Korean Opera House. One of them was gifted with a basso profundo which would have admirably qualified him to play the heavy villain in a transpontine theatre, while the other approached more nearly to the light tenor. From time to time during the whole course of our long night journey the heavy villain and the light tenor, apparently untired by their weary march, favoured us with choice operatic selections, howled out with the full force of their lungs, but yet not altogether unmusical.

Soon after leaving the fork in the road we entered a little village, and at one of the houses the same interesting performance which we had witnessed before was repeated. Another wordy altercation, containing, it is to be feared, many terms which will not be found in a Korean translation of the New Testament, ensued between the mafoos and the grocer, and we began to fear that we should find groceries too numerous along the route. At last the mafoos emerged from the house with a new lantern, and we proceeded once more. The performance was repeated

from time to time till we grew accustomed to it, but farther on the journey a pleasing change took place

Nearing one village we observed a ruddy glow ahead; and on reaching the spot we found a bonfire of dried grasses blazing in the middle of the road. Several villagers were gathered round the fire, and one of these, after seizing a long pine torch and lighting it, ran along in front of us, casting a bright glare on our way. Occasionally, as the flame went down and the torch began to smoulder, he brandished it about in the air to produce a current and so feed the flame. Sometimes he would twirl it completely round, sending the fiery brand whizzing within two or three inches of the leading pony's nose, casting a shower of sparks around him, and enveloping us all in a dense cloud of smoke. The ponies, however, moved along with the gentlest placidity. Nothing can disturb the equanimity of a Korean pack-horse. When he reaches a point at which he is accustomed to stop, no amount of pounding will induce him to move on, and no efforts of persuasion will induce him to move for any length of time in any other position than with his nose touching the tail of the pony in front of him.

From this point till almost the end of our journey we were never without a villager running or walking ahead of us with a light—a torch of pine or dried grasses, or a lantern with a candle in it. Sometimes the stages were long, and sometimes short, but at the end of each stage the light-bearer returned to his home, his place being taken by a resident of the spot to which he had brought us.



Sometimes, when the torch was of dried grasses, the bearer would be beset by a growing fear lest it should burn out before he reached the end of his stage, and he would suddenly start off at a brisk speed, the ponies, who well knew what was expected of them, shambling along behind and keeping pace with him. Whether it is one of the duties imposed by the State upon Corean villagers to light the belated traveller upon his way we were unable to learn, but certainly we never saw our mafaos reward any of the torch-bearers, and out of the pittance which they received it is difficult to imagine how they could have afforded to do so.

Towards ten o'clock we reached the halfway house, and settled down to an hour's halt. We entered the hostelry, and made ourselves at home at one end of the room, while our ponies were accommodated at the other. Our end had a boarded floor, raised a foot or so from the ground, and covered with mats, on the edge of which we could sit very comfortably while we discussed our dinner. Our friends at the capital had provided us each with a quart bottle of beer, and a goodly store of provisions, and as we spread out our feast on a small stool brought to us for the purpose, mine host of the halfway house, his native guests, and our mafaos crowded round in good-humoured curiosity to obtain a lesson in Western civilisation.

Having satisfied our appetites, we made over the remains of the dinner to the natives, some of whom we also treated to what was evidently their first taste of German beer. With one exception they expressed their high opinion of the liquor in the most unmistakable terms, but this one

man—perhaps the future Father Mathew of his country—took but a single mouthful, and ejected it with an expression of extreme disgust.

We were soon mounted and off again, the heavy ruffian and the light tenor singing with renewed vigour in the exhilaration of their sprints. Somewhere about midnight we reached the bottom of a steep hill. Here two lads with lanterns came forward to light us on our way. One walked on ahead with a large square paper lantern, and the other followed with a second light behind, but even with this brilliant illumination the ascent was by no means pleasant, and the descent was even less so. With the ponies clattering down over an invisible stream of loose stones, their backs having an inclination of somewhere near forty-five degrees, the sense of security was not excessive; and if we had met with an accident and slid down the hill ponyless and in a sitting posture, it would have been but small consolation to us to know that we were not the first Europeans who had come down the hill in this undignified fashion. However, we reached the bottom in safety, and flattered ourselves we were out of danger. A few minutes later, a due catastrophe occurred before our eyes. Our leading light-bearer took advantage of the opportunity, as soon as the descent was completed, of taking a peep at his candle to see whether it was likely to last till the end of his stage. After gazing at the light for a few seconds, his eyes were too dazed for him to see what was before him, and, oblivious of his danger, he walked straight over the steep edge of a yawning precipice which skirted the pathway, and tumbled

clean to the bottom, which luckily was here only ten or twelve feet below. The front pony, losing sight of his guiding star, stopped dead, with his feet on the edge of the cleft, while the rest of the cavalcade came perforce to a halt. For a few seconds all was still, and we feared the poor fellow was badly hurt, but we soon heard him whimpering below in answer to the inquiries of the mafoos, who presently descended the ravine and administered a drubbing to the unfortunate youth. Some five or ten minutes was occupied in searching for half an inch of candle-end which had fallen out of the lantern in its descent. The men then scrambled out on to the road, and the youth was sent packing home, still whimpering, but somewhat consoled by a dose of medicine which we administered to him in the shape of a handful of copper cash.

After another hour's ride in the dark, over a terribly rough road, the ponies were thoroughly worn out, and humanity and stiffness compelled us to dismount and walk. As far as the brutes were concerned, however, our humanity was a failure, for our places were immediately taken by the mafoos. It was three o'clock in the morning when the seaport was reached.

Chemulpo was in a state of intense excitement over the return of the Dai In Kun, who had arrived while we were at the capital. A dense crowd of Koreans, with a sprinkling of Japanese, had collected in front of the Chinese Consulate, where his Royal Highness was staying. Korean officials, wearing peacocks' feathers in their hats, were hurrying to and fro, and a double line of maimes from the

Chinese man-of-war kept order and prevented the rabble from blocking up the path, along which officials were continually arriving to pay their respects to the Prince. It sounded very strange, and somewhat significant, to hear the words of command, 'Shoulder arms!' 'Order arms!' 'Right turn!' and so forth, delivered in our Western barbarian tongue, and responded to with military promptitude. Crowds of Koreans had collected along the road in the hope of seeing the Prince start on his march to the capital, but as we learnt on good authority that he was not likely to leave Chemulpo that day, we boarded the *Ashington*, and awaited her departure for Gensan.

Some thirty hours after leaving Chemulpo the monotony of the voyage was relieved by the announcement that Port Hamilton, then lately added to the Empire in which the sun never sets, was then close at hand. Telescopes and binoculars were soon brought into requisition, and a little later, as the *Ashington* passed within three or four miles of the entrance of the harbour, we obtained a capital view of it. On the slopes of the three islands which form the splendid natural harbour we could discern signs of pretty extensive cultivation, while in the harbour itself some nine or ten vessels of the British fleet were lying at anchor, the great *Agamemnon* plainly distinguishable among them.

There were at the time of our visit only five European residents in Gensan, and these represented four different nations, but a row of semi-European houses ran along the Bund, having a pretty appearance from the sea. The place has a fine, healthy climate. Game of almost

every description abounds. Fine large salmon were exposed for sale for a few pence each, and oysters might be had in any number for the picking up. The oysters we found exceedingly good, while the salmon, though not equal to that of England or Scotland, is in no degree inferior to that for which Hakodate, in Japan, is celebrated. Unlike Chemulpo, Gensan is very little affected by the tide, the rise and fall being only a very few inches. One corner of the harbour is usually frozen in winter, but as far as the ordinary anchorage the port is open all the year round. A few miles above it is Port Lazereff, the harbour upon which Russia is believed to have long been casting greedy eyes. Overlooking the settlement is one of the numerous beacon-hills which are found in all parts of the country. They are used for flashing from point to point to the capital of the kingdom signals by which his Majesty is enabled to assure himself every night that each province of his dominion is resting in the enjoyment of tranquillity.

The people of this eastern coast we found entirely good-humoured and well-disposed towards foreigners, though rather troublesome in their intense curiosity as to the manners and customs of the strangers who had come among them. Picnicking some few miles from the settlement, we were entirely hemmed in by an admiring crowd of Corean men and half-naked children, whose good humour was immensely strengthened by the present of a few empty beer and wine bottles—articles so highly prized by the natives that, in the early days, foreigners were fre-

quently offered more for them than they had cost, including freight from the land of their birth, when filled with the best of good liquor.

Our party got separated during the day, and on our rejoining forces Captain Hepworth, of the *Ashington*, had a wonderful story to relate of a Corean damsel of surpassing loveliness whom he had encountered in the course of his rambling, but who had fled wildly at his approach. It was noted as a remarkable fact with regard to Corean architecture that the bridges are so constructed that one has to swim to and from either end of them. The inference was, however, rather rash, as we came across only one bridge of this description, and it is possible either that the bridge had been originally built for a narrower stream or that the stream had grown out of it, like a schoolboy out of his pants. In any case the fact remains that the bridge was there, over the stream we had to cross, and yet we were compelled to wade nearly to our knees before reaching it and after leaving it. The arrangement, however, was not without its advantages, as it enabled one member of the party to create a little innocent mirth among his companions by inadvertently sitting down in the middle of the stream.

On the occasion of our second visit to the northern port of Corea, some twelve months later, the little band of five Europeans who formed its Western population had become still further diminished, and of Englishmen not one was left. We relieved the monotony of our enforced stay of three days, while waiting for the conjunction of fine weather and calm sea which would enable cargo to be discharged,

with one or two pleasant duck-shooting excursions on shore, and before sunset on Monday, November 9, we were at last steaming along the shores of Asiatic Russia

On the following evening we threaded our way among the numerous islands which guard its entrance, and soon found ourselves in the midst of the 'Golden Horn,' the magnificent harbour of Vladivostok, Russia's great naval station on the Pacific. We were slowly moving towards the anchorage when the puffing and snorting of a steam-launch was heard through the darkness. Captain Walker, our genial skipper, began to grow nervous. Some months previously there had been several cases of cholera in Nagasaki, and, although that port had now been pronounced entirely free of infection for several weeks, it was quite possible that the Russian officials, who pay but little regard to foreign merchant shipping interests, would enforce quarantine regulations. Our captain's fears proved only too well grounded. The steam-launch, with naval and medical officers on board, came close up to us, and a voice with a strong foreign accent hailed us and asked, 'Where are you from?' 'Nagasaki,' replied the captain. 'Corea?' asked the naval officer. 'Yes' '*Kaïrantine*' The captain muttered an imprecation, and we slowly backed into the quarantine harbour. We learnt that we were to spend three days here on board, and that the ground of our detention was an alleged outbreak of cholera in Corea, of which we had certainly heard nothing either at Fusan or Gensan.

In the quarantine harbour we met an old friend, the

British steamer *Memling*, which we had encountered in Shanghai, and again at Nagasaki. The captain hailed us with a shout of welcome, and inquired our fate. On learning that we were quarantined for calling at Corea, he replied with a cheerful laugh that *he* had been quarantined for *not* calling there, but that his term of imprisonment would expire in the morning.

The lights of Vladivostok, stretching up the face of the hills at the back of the harbour, presented an exceedingly pretty appearance at night, and by day we could amuse our ample leisure by taking occasional shots at a small whale, of the species known to sailors as 'black fish,' which was disporting itself in the harbour. When this amusement failed us we could indulge in the pastime known as 'bull,' or 'deck-quarts,' and occasionally the visit of a steam-launch from shore relieved the monotony, for the pretence at isolation was very feebly carried out. However, in spite of these diversions, the three days were wearisomely long, and we hailed with delight the appearance at noon on the third day of a steam-launch bringing to us the medical officer of the port. Without the smallest pretence of making a medical examination of passengers or crew, he gave us permission to proceed to the anchorage, and two hours later we set foot upon Siberian soil.



## CHAPTER III

## VLADIVOSTOK

The first sight of Siberia—Russian officers and German merchants—A Siberian hotel—Landing baggage—A five weeks' delay—Danes, Germans, English, and Americans—Sunshine and frost—Public buildings—Mexican dollars and Russian roubles—Expenses of the journey—Sledges—Outfit—Life in Vladivostok—Drunkenness and gambling—A suicide's funeral—A German brewery—Tigers—A big bag—A German Singing Club—Vodka—Russian robbers and Manza pirates

THE traveller who enters the great Russian Empire for the first time by its Eastern gates can scarcely fail to experience a strange sensation as though he were entering into a new world. He may be familiar with the ancient semi-barbarous civilisations of China and Japan, but, though the streets and wharves of Vladivostok are thronged with pig-tailed Celestials and Corean coolies, these are evidently strangers in a foreign land. The traveller, on his way to the northern port, will almost of



necessity have seen something of the European colonies and settlements which are dotted about the Eastern seas and along the shores of China and Japan. To these colonies and settlements nearly every nation of Western Europe has contributed something of its national characteristics; but still in nearly every case it is the English influence that is predominant. At every open port in China, Japan, and Corea, the Englishman finds his own language to be the recognised medium of communication between foreigners, and everywhere he can feel himself at home.

As soon as he passes the northern boundary of the Korean Peninsula all this is changed. Vladivostok, the 'Ruler of the East,' is less distinctively Russian in its tone than any town we were to pass through during the next four months of our travels, but, nevertheless, the national characteristics were everywhere apparent. Proceeding from the wharf, through the Chinese bazaar or market-place, and along the main street towards the one hotel which the town then boasted, every third European we met was dressed in the uniform of a civil, naval, or military officer of the Russian Empire. Along the street, flanked on either side by wooden houses of a type seen nowhere out of Russia, carts were driving, with the curious *duga*, or heavy wooden arch, rising in every case above the house's head. In the centre of the town are two imposing brick buildings, one, in castellated form, comprising the offices and stores of a German firm, the leading merchants of the port. For the trade of Vladivostok is

nearly all in foreign—chiefly in German—hands. The better class of Russians are almost all of official rank, the naval element of course greatly predominating. The town is situated at the base of a little range of hills, from the crest of which fine views are obtained of the beautiful harbour, Peter the Great's Bay, and away to the right the Amur Bay, the narrow neck of land across the Golden Horn, and the numerous islands beyond. The harbour itself could afford an anchorage for an entire fleet, and if only its waters would remain open during the winter, it would be difficult to find its equal anywhere in the world. Its entrance is guarded by forts said not to be very formidable, and a conspicuous object on the water was a large floating dock, which, though its construction had been commenced several years ago, was yet far from complete.

Under the kindly guidance of a friendly resident, we were soon safely ensconced in two little cupboards, each containing a camp bedstead, and embodying the best accommodation to be obtained at the 'Hotel of the Golden Horn,' or 'Golden Gate Hotel.' The first is a literal translation of the Russian title, and the second is the English rendering of that title which appears over the doorway. Soon a long line of Corean coolies was marching in proces-



*Russian Officer  
Vladivostok -*

sion through the town, bearing on their backs the formidable array of baggage which we were about to convey across two continents. A comfortable folding mattress, with accompanying pillows, quilts, and blankets, formed one man's load. Shot-guns, Winchester rifles, cartridges enough for a protracted siege, and a pair of formidable revolvers made up our armament of sport and war, a huge box of canned provisions relieved us from all fear of starvation on our journey, and a case of brandy and whisky, smuggled in with ease under the eyes of the customs officer, reminded us that we should not be entirely without creature comforts when removed from civilisation. We flattered ourselves that nothing requisite for ease and comfort in travelling had been forgotten. We had, however,

overlooked one important element of comfort—the reduction of baggage to the smallest possible compass, and this element we subsequently attained in some degree by an occasional judicious jettisoning of cargo.

We soon ascertained that we had arrived in Vladivostok much earlier than was necessary for our purpose. The winter load from this port



winds northward, crossing on its way the Khanka Sea—a large, shallow lake, measuring some sixty or seventy miles

from north to south, and nearly forty from east to west. In summer it is crossed by small steamers, which continue their journey along the Sungacha and Ussuri rivers to the junction of the latter with the Amur at the great military centre of Khabarovka. Long before we arrived, however, the steamboat service had ceased for the winter, although it would probably be



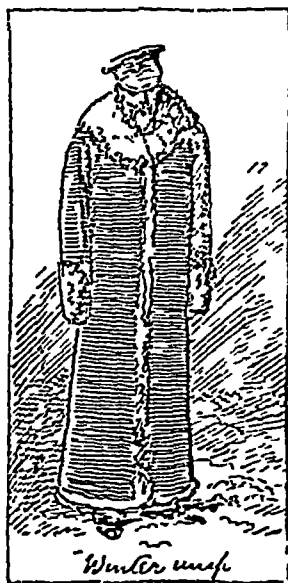
another six weeks before the ice on the surface of the lake would have attained a sufficient strength to admit of sledging in perfect security. In every spring and autumn there is, in fact, a transition period between the time of hard frost and that of open-water navigation during which travelling in Siberia becomes almost an impossibility.

We had thus to resign ourselves to at least a five weeks' residence in the little naval port. But in spite of our limited knowledge of the Russian language, we soon found that we could obtain a fair amount of diversion to relieve the monotony of this long period of waiting. In addition to its considerable German population, Vladivostok shelters a goodly number of Western-European residents of other nationalities. Foremost among the foreign insti-

tutions is the terminal office of the Great Northern Telegraph Company, whose cables connect the Imperial Russian land-lines with the treaty ports of China and Japan. From the superintendent, Mr Sonne, and his wife—an English lady—and from the numerous subordinate officers of the company, all of whom spoke English with the purity which hardly any other nation achieves in so high a degree as the Danish, we received constantly a hospitable welcome. Mr Sonne has, at one period and another, spent many years of his life in Vladivostok. Being a keen naturalist and sportsman, he is intimately acquainted with all the features of the surrounding country, and he was the means of securing for us, while the weather remained favourable, more than one pleasant excursion into the wild country surrounding the little town whose rapid growth he had watched almost from the days of its infancy. The English residents are few in number. They comprise, in addition to Mrs Sonne, Mr Hagemann, a British merchant, from whom we obtained much kindly assistance, a gentleman who has for many years occupied a responsible position at the Imperial arsenal, one or two whaling captains, and an old sailor. We were told also that two of the Russian officials of the port were married to English wives, but that these ladies, having spent almost all their lives in Siberia, were more Russian than the Russians themselves. Two American merchants, one married to a lady of his own nationality, a few Danes, and a Frenchman, conducting, after the manner of his nation, an excellent cafe, nearly completed the list of non-Teutonic foreign residents.

The sun was shining brightly, and, indeed, almost fiercely, on the day of our arrival, and it seemed difficult to imagine that during the previous night the thermometer had fallen several degrees below the freezing point. For Vladivostok, despite the cold which in winter covers the whole harbour with a thick sheet of ice, lies on a parallel of latitude considerably south of Marseilles, and even in the depth of winter, we were told, there are few days on which the dripping of water from the icicles pendent from the roofs does not bear witness to the power of the noon-day sun. Hailing an 'ishvoshtchik,' or driver of a vehicle for hire, we set forth to survey the scene of our coming six weeks' sojourn.

Vladivostok has a variety of public buildings, but they are none of them very imposing. The Government offices, dignified by the names of the 'Treasury' and the 'Chancellerie,' are little better than log-huts. The 'Admiralty' has a somewhat more striking appearance, being surmounted by a dome, from which the national naval flag is generally waving, and a considerable amount of elaborate carving graces the front of the 'Naval Club,' at which the majority of the official classes spend a considerable portion of their time at billiards, cigarette-smoking and



card-playing The Greek Church is a singularly plain and unattractive edifice, suggesting by its diminutive size that the orthodox residents of the port are not very zealous in their devotions, but a little Lutheran chapel, with whose German pastor we became acquainted, is interesting as being, if I mistake not, the only Protestant place of worship in the whole of Eastern Siberia Beyond the town is a brick-making establishment, carried on by a Danish firm, but at present Vladivostok appears to have emerged but a very little way out of the Age of Wood. A substantial brick house, with some pretensions to architectural beauty, was, however, rising up in a pleasant position above the main street, and this, we were informed, was destined to serve as an hotel, conducted on English principles We sincerely wished the enterprise had been brought to a successful issue before our arrival, for our first experience of the luxuries of Russian hotels did not prepossess us in their favour

For the first day or two after our arrival we found ample occupation in the arrangement of our finances. Vladivostok numbers more than one bank-agent among its residents, but, nevertheless, we had found that the only plan by which we could make sure of not being left in the lurch was to bring our resources with us from China in the shape of hard cash When it is remembered that the sole currency among foreigners in the Far East is the Mexican dollar—a clumsy coin, about the size of a crown-piece, nominally worth four shillings, but at that time actually fetching only about 3s 2d owing to the lamentable



fall in the value of silver—it will be seen that there were considerable inconveniences in this mode of monetary transfer. The system has its advantages in China. The coinage in use is so utterly unmanageable that none except a few eccentric individuals ever carry money about with them. Everyone lives on credit. For the smallest article of daily consumption he presents a 'chit,' or 'I O U,' and at the end of each month the bills are brought to him, and—sometimes—paid. However, we feared that the Siberians would not prove quite so confiding as Shanghai tradesmen, and we had accordingly shipped by the steamer on which we travelled a small scaled box of 'merry Mexicans.' For some reason travellers are usually very chary of mentioning the cost of their expeditions, but in view of the possibility that some of my readers may be induced by my example to undertake a journey into Northern Asian snows, I will endeavour to place before them as nearly as possible the precise monetary cost of such an adventure. The box, then, contained exactly sixteen hundred dollars, and, in addition, we had with us, after paying our expenses to Vladivostok, some fifty or sixty Mexicans, and a small reserve fund in pounds sterling—say in all 275*l*. Travelling in Siberia is very cheap, and we were assured that we were unnecessarily burdening ourselves with funds, but we thought it best to be on the safe side. We calculated that, at the very worst, this sum would land us in a civilised town, whence, if necessary, additional funds might be won for, and, as a matter of fact, we arrived in Moscow with a margin which was nearly sufficient to carry us comfortably

to London by easy stages, extending over a period of nearly three weeks.

The coinage of Russia is, to all intents and purposes, an unconvertible paper currency. A silver rouble is occasionally seen, but even when found it is only to be obtained at an expenditure of at least one and a half rouble notes, so greatly has the paper money depreciated. There are probably more silver roubles to be found in Vladivostok than in almost any other Russian town, the reason being that the Korean and Chinese merchants, with whom much of the trade of the port is carried on, regard the rouble note with a distrust which does credit to their sagacity. For a similar reason Mexican dollars are in great request in the town, and we were congratulated on having performed a successful stroke of business in bringing our money in this form. Ultimately, after some little difficulty, we succeeded in exchanging our dollars with a Chinese merchant for rouble notes, at the fairly remunerative rate of 1.83 rouble per dollar, the paper rouble being at that time worth about two shillings.

Having satisfactorily completed this exchange, we next turned our attention to the important question of outfit. The first requisite of Siberian travel is a good sledge. It is true that the voyager may, if he likes, travel by *pereladnaya*—that is, changing his sledge at every station, and paying a trifling fee each time for the use of a Government vehicle, but as this necessitates the packing and unpacking of baggage about four hundred times during the journey, at all hours of the day and night, and sometimes

having to put up with exceedingly uncomfortable conveyances, this method is not often adopted by those who are on pleasure bent. Unfortunately a good sledge is almost unprocureable in Vladivostok. The traveller proceeding eastward may purchase at Trumen a strong, comfortable, Kazan-made sledge for a mere trifle, and, having submitted it to all the rough treatment of a five-thousand-mile journey, may sell it at Vladivostok for considerably more than the original cost. The westward-bound traveller, however, is not nearly so well situated. For our part we secured with some difficulty a second-hand vehicle, which, though anything but beautiful in appearance, was certainly roomy, and to our inexperienced eyes looked strong. It cost us 70 roubles, and during our journey we spent 71 roubles upon it for repairs. I will not anticipate matters by here dilating upon the annoyance, the delays, the discomfort, and, I regret to say, the occasional strong language of which that sledge was the cause. I only mention the matter as a warning to others about to indulge in a similar adventure to be certain they have secured a sledge which is not liable to a constant succession of break-downs, such as always take the opportunity of occurring when one is several miles from a town.

The sledges in ordinary use by Russians travelling in Siberia are of three kinds—the *rashok*, a vehicle entirely inclosed, and resembling a huge brougham on runners, the *kachovka*, a great open sledge, roughly built of wood and matting; and with no covering except a piece of matting or felt to spread over the recumbent figures of the travellers

in snowy weather; and the *porosha* The conveyance which was to be our home for the two or three months of our journey belonged to the third class. It was a large, deep, roughly built sledge, open in front, but covered in at the back with a canvas hood lined with thick felt. The driver's seat consisted of a flat board, apparently designed by a coachbuilder ignorant of the fact that a sledge-driver is, like other human beings, gifted with a pair of legs. From this board sloped downwards and outwards, till their points nearly touched the ground on either side, a pair of stout ash poles, designed partially to prevent the vehicle from overturning, and partially, like the scythes of an ancient British war-chariot, as weapons of defence and attack. For, as we were to learn by painful experience, there are parts of the journey during which collisions are of almost hourly occurrence, and the outrigger serves not only to protect the sledge from damage when meeting with an opponent of superior strength, but to drive weaker enemies in the shape of freight sledges from the roadway, or to force a passage through their midst.

In the way of armour to repel the attacks of cold, we each purchased—firstly, a double deer-skin *kukhanka*. This is an excellent hooded garment of Kamchatdale manufacture, and is almost as much of a curiosity in Western Russia as in England. It has no buttons, or other fastening, but is drawn over the head like a smock-frock, and tightened round the waist by a belt and round the throat by a scarf, the hood being either thrown back on the shoulders or worn over the head, like a monk's cowl. In

addition, we each purchased a long *shuba*, or coat of rough sheepskin, with the wool turned inwards, a camel-hair *bashlik*, a combination of hood and scarf; fur-lined caps, and fur gloves made like those of our infancy, with



one compartment for the four fingers together, and another for the thumb. For the feet we procured goat's-hair stockings, dogskin socks of Chinese manufacture, and thick felt boots coming up above the knees. A large sheepskin rug, lined with felt, together with the folding mattress and

pillows which we had brought with us from Shanghai, completed our equipment; and when we surveyed our purchases, half filling our little apartments at the 'Golden Horn,' we were convinced that in the event of our being frozen to death no coroner's jury could attribute the occurrence to a lack of proper precautions. One veteran Russian traveller, indeed, regarded these extensive preparations a little scornfully, advising us to discard either the kukhanka or the shuba, but later experience, with the thermometer at 65° Fahrenheit below zero, proved that no single part of our outfit could have been safely dispensed with.

Our arrangements were soon made. Our landlord had kindly undertaken to procure for us all the Government papers necessary for our journey, and, imposing a trust in him which unfortunately did not prove warranted, we rested on our oars and looked about us for means of beguiling the tedium of our enforced five weeks' stay. The hotel itself afforded us ample opportunities of studying one phase of Russian colonial life, and it cannot be denied that we saw much that a stern moralist would condemn Europeans in the Far East are often accused, not altogether unjustly, of being unduly self-indulgent, and Shanghai at one time possessed a particularly unenviable reputation in this respect. Even in these days it must be admitted that a lapse from sobriety is regarded as a more venial offence among foreigners in China, and indeed in all parts of the East, than it is at home, but in this regard Shanghai certainly does not hold a candle to Vladivostok. It was no

uncommon occurrence to see naval, military, and civil officers of high rank staggering about the billiard and bar room of the Golden Horn Hotel in an almost helpless state of intoxication, and we heard, and were to some extent able to corroborate the statement from personal observation, that heavy gambling was very widely indulged in. A few days' after our arrival we saw brought ashore at the wharf the body of an unfortunate lieutenant of artillery who had been drowned by the capsizing of a boat, the accident being admittedly due to drunkenness, and later on the town was startled by the news that a young lieutenant—a prominent member of Vladivostok society, secretary of the Amateur Dramatic Club, and leader in all social movements—had blown his brains out, having failed in a desperate attempt to borrow money for the purpose of covering defalcations into which he had been led by losses at cards. According to strict Russian ecclesiastical law, we were told, no suicide is entitled to Christian burial, but in this case at least the funeral rite was performed in its entirety, the only distinction made being that the ceremony did not take place till after sundown. The funeral procession was followed by the deceased's comrades in arms, the company of which he had been lieutenant—the military band playing a funeral march—and a large number of prominent residents of the port. According to the custom of the Greek Church the body was borne along uncovered, the coffin-lid being carried before it by six of the mourners.

Some four or five miles from the town, on a picturesque spot overlooking the Amur Bay, some enterprising spirits

have, within the last few years, established a brewery of beer. The scheme was not very successful at first. The beer produced was not sufficiently palatable either to induce the Russians to renounce their favourite vodka, or to wean the Teutonic population from their native brew, imported in bottles. Latterly, however, under experienced German hands, an excellent beverage has been produced, and the industry promises to be highly successful. The road to the brewery forms the pleasantest drive in the neighbourhood, and in the summer the grounds are converted into a kind of *biergarten*. This had been closed for the winter long before the time of our arrival; but, nevertheless, there was one object of interest remaining in the grounds which was of itself sufficient to repay a visit. This was a wooden cage resembling a huge mousetrap. Some little time before the brewer had been seriously inconvenienced by the periodical nightly visits of a tiger to his grounds. This animal, besides causing the brewer a certain amount of alarm on his own account, carried off some two or three fine dogs. The trap was accordingly constructed, baited, and set for the beast, and, after a few nights, the tiger seized the bait and locked himself in. He was a fine, large brute, and during the first few days after his capture all Vladivostok flocked to the brewery to pay him a visit. He was subsequently sold, and carted through Siberia on show. We heard a rumour that he had broken loose in Tomsk, but we ascertained, on arrival there, that there was no truth in this story.

Tigers are rather numerous in the neighbourhood, but,



having plenty of deer's meat always within easy reach, they seldom attack men. Sportsmen when deer-shooting, however, occasionally experience exciting encounters, and the animals are sometimes even seen on the posting road.

Mr. Hagemann told us that in the winter of 1885 he was sledging between Khabarovka and Vladivostok when a tiger suddenly made his appearance on the high road some distance ahead of the sledge. The horses at once stopped, and our friend entered into an animated conference with the driver as to the course that should be pursued. Mr. Hagemann suggested that one of the horses should be cut loose and sacrificed, but the driver refused to do this unless his fare would guarantee him the cost of the animal. To this Mr. Hagemann demurred, and no action was taken beyond remaining patiently still until the tiger deigned to move slowly from the roadway, when the sledge continued its journey.

The most remarkable tiger adventure we heard of, however, was that of a young Russian—scarcely more than a boy—who actually killed three large tigers single-handed, thus making one of the biggest bags on record. Having shot a deer and allowed it to lie where it fell, he returned some hours later to take possession of his prize, when he found the carcass devoured, and three tigers lying sleeping around. He lifted his rifle—an ordinary Winchester repeating carbine, I believe—and shot the three in succession, killing two and wounding the third. The wounded animal sprang at him and tore the flesh of his arm before he succeeded in despatching it.

One excellent institution in Vladivostok, which has done yeoman's service in promoting the success of the brewery, is the German Singing Club, a very pleasant musical and convivial society to which nearly all the German male population, many of the Danish, and some few Russians belong. Every Wednesday evening during the winter the members meet together for practice, and every Saturday evening they hold a species of private concert. There being few social institutions to enter into rivalry with this club, the singing members devote themselves to the study and practice of music with wonderful application and energy, and our stay in Vladivostok was enlivened by some of the pleasantest evenings of combined part-singing and beer-drinking which could possibly be imagined. It would not become me to place on record the number of empty bottles which covered the floors and tables of the club rooms as these nights wore on, but to the Russian, whose one idea of conviviality is to gulp down, in rapid succession, *petits verres* of raw spirits, it might well have taught a lesson in the higher pleasures and less baneful effects of indulging in copious draughts of a mild and wholesome beverage.

For vodka, the universal Russian drink, is not remarkable for either mildness or wholesomeness. It is easily made. Economical householders always manufacture it at home. They purchase a bottle of undiluted spirit of wine and mix it with an equal quantity of water. That is all. It is never further diluted, never mixed with aerated waters. It is drunk from liqueur or small wine glasses, and the one commendable point connected with its consumption is that

it is usually drunk with an accompanying 'zakouska,' a morsel of black or white bread with a scrap of caviar, smoked salmon-back, raw salt fish, sausage, or other delicacy. A rather amusing story went the round of Vladivostok during our stay. It was said that an officer of a British steamer then in port, having learnt how to make vodka, bought a bottle of the raw spirit and took it on board, intending to mix it with water. During his absence from the ship the Scottish engineers found the bottle, and, not being able to read the Russian label, supposed it to contain properly prepared vodka. They finished the bottle. Russian heads are said to be strong, but Scotch are evidently stronger.

In early days the inhabitants of Vladivostok suffered much from thievish raids by the native Mongolian races—Tungus or Manchurian—Manzas, as they are usually called by the Russians, the name being also frequently applied in Vladivostok to the Chinese emigrants who flock to the port in the capacities of merchants, coolies, and house-servants. M. Cotteau, who visited Vladivostok in 1881, declares that it was not then prudent to venture by night too far from home, on account of the probability of an attack by Manza robbers, or even, he had been told, by soldiers. Of late there has been an improvement in this respect, but even now the danger is not altogether removed, as was proved by one or two events which occurred during our stay. One evening an attack was made on the brickworks which I have mentioned as lying on the outskirts of the town, and the Danish proprietor

received a somewhat severe wound from an axe. The brickmaker had, however, armed himself with a gun, which he used as a club, breaking it across the body of his assailant, who then decamped with his companions. A few days afterwards a Russian soldier went to a physician for surgical treatment, and displayed wounds which bore suspiciously the appearance of having been caused by the brickmaker's gun. As he could not satisfactorily account for his injuries he was arrested, but up to the time of our leaving Vladivostok we had not heard the result of the investigations.

A far more serious outrage than this, however, occurred a few days after our arrival in Siberia, though, as the victims were only Koreans, the event attracted little or no attention. While we were negotiating our monetary exchange in the office of a foreign merchant, a small party of Koreans entered for the purpose of making purchases of T-cloths and other articles of Western manufacture. We were afterwards told that these men, having completed their purchases, set off on their return journey to Korea in a native junk, and had not long left the harbour when they were attacked by Manchurian pirates, who put every one of them to death and made off with the booty. The news of this outrage was brought to Vladivostok by a party of Koreans who saw the attack in the distance from another junk, but were either unable or afraid to go to their countrymen's assistance. An endeavour was made to get the Russian authorities to take the matter up with a view to clearing their coast of these pirates, but without result.

## CHAPTER IV

## DEER-STALKING IN EASTERN SIBERIA

A voyage in the *Anna*—The beginning of winter—Close quarters—Perog—Strelak Bay—An abandoned Finnish settlement—A life of adventure—A steady nerve—A smoky chimney—The samovar—Deer stalking in the snow—Human deer—The moccasins of the savage—A re christening—Wary deer—An improvised tea kettle—Blood stained tiger tracks in the snow—A dead shot—Our bag—A feast of deer's liver—Siberian venison—Return to Vladivostok

ON the morning of Friday, November 19th, new style, or 7th according to the Calendar of Eastern Europe, the Russian sloop *Anna*, Captain Hook, left Vladivostok bound for Strelak Bay. Her crew consisted of four, all told, namely, her captain, a hardy old Finlander, Mr. Radcliffe, her English chief officer and cook, and two ordinary seamen—a Corean and a Russian. She carried four saloon passengers—Mr. Karl Schoultz, photographer, Lieutenant Ratzul, of the Russian Sappers, Mr. C. J. Uren, and the author, while in the fore cabin, which was also the fo'c'sle, was the lieutenant's soldier-servant. My comrade and I had, three days before, accepted with delight an invitation to join a party of sportsmen who were bent on a week's deer-shooting in the wild, uninhabited



castle Into the narrow space between this platform and the roof, four men could crawl head-foremost and sleep more or less comfortably side by side

Soon the captain and all the passengers were on board, and with a favourable breeze we were scudding northwards along the Siberian coast Here we had our first foretaste of the rigour of a Siberian winter Our kukliankas kept our bodies comfortably warm, but we found that leather, even in the form of stout, waterproof shooting-boots, is ill adapted for excessive cold A frozen sensation about the toes drove us into the cabin, and we were not surprised to hear a few minutes afterwards that the captain had been called forward in the capacity of medical officer of his ship to attend a case of frostbite which had broken out among his crew

We had a goodly store of provisions on board A huge round of beef served as the *pièce de résistance*, and as this lay always on the table, whenever one felt hungry one could hack a lump off and gnaw away at it There was, too, a plentiful stock of minor delicacies—German sausages, smoked salmon-back, Dutch cheese, potted meats, and jams, but the supply of plates and table implements was somewhat lacking However, we were soon revelling in the delights of 'roughing it' Mr. Radcliffe was a famous hand at soups, and as the one cabin served as kitchen as well as bedroom and dining saloon, we had all the pleasure of seeing the savoury mess preparing under our eyes If occasionally a foreign substance found its way into the pot, it was easily removed, and, as our motto was 'every man for himself,'

the additional delight was afforded of fishing for choice mollusks with a spoon. At our first meal Mr Schoultz produced with triumph a gigantic specimen of the Russian national dish—the perog, or fish-pie. In this case the perog consisted of layers of paste, meat, smoked salmon, and white cabbage, with a covering of wheaten crust. It is a curiously flavoured dish, but by no means to be despised by a hungry man. The Russians are exceedingly fond of perog, indeed, it is only a few months since a peasant got himself into serious trouble for expressing his fondness for it in too unmeasured terms. After working his way through a particularly delicious perog, he declared that he would rather kiss the gul who had made it than the ikon, or sacred picture of the Russian national church. This terrible piece of blasphemy having been proved against him, he was sentenced to six months imprisonment, but a higher tribunal, recognising that this was unduly severe, subsequently remitted five-sixths of the sentence. Our perog was certainly not unappetising when it arrived on board, but I should not have thought it worth even a month's imprisonment. Moreover, the table being chiefly occupied by the beef, a place was found for it on the floor, and, as our space was exceedingly limited, we frequently found ourselves walking about in the pie. The fragments were subsequently gathered together and put in a safer place, but somehow it remained rather neglected after this treatment.

It was nearly nightfall when at length we came to anchor close in shore in Stielok Bay, and we were soon on



land surveying the deserted scene where, a few years before, a hopeful young colony had been planted For, some twenty years ago, a large party of Finnish emigrants obtained a grant of land from the Tsar and settled down in this pretty bay, Captain Hook, the commander of the *Anna*, being the leader of the expedition and master of the vessel in which the emigrants sailed from Europe to Siberia, and Mr Schoultz one of its most active members The attempt at colonisation had proved a failure, but many of the Finnish emigrants are still to be found living comfortably in the towns and villages of Eastern Siberia Then log-houses at Stielok Bay have entirely disappeared, but a close examination of the soil in many places still reveals the signs of former cultivation

Since those days Captain Hook had led a remarkable life of adventure Sometimes living far away from civilised towns, surrounded by savage tribes, sometimes whale-fishing off the coast of Kamchatka, he had amassed a wonderful store of curious knowledge, and could tell many marvellous tales of adventure After one of his expeditions he returned to his lonely house to find his whole family and household murdered by Tungus lovers To this incident I never heard the captain refer, but to the deep influence that the terrible event had had upon his life, and upon his manner of regarding the whole Chinese race, his friends in Vladivostok bore strange testimony As a tiger-slayer he had established quite a wide local reputation, and one story told of him is very characteristic of his coolness of manner and steadiness of nerve It is said that

he was once strolling along with his rifle in his hand in search of deer, when a tiger suddenly sprang from cover and crouched down a few yards in front of him. Advancing age has compelled the captain to take to spectacles, and on this occasion they had become dimmed in a manner which was not likely to conduce to a sure aim. The captain accordingly removed his glasses, carefully wiped them, replaced them, then raised the rifle and shot the beast through the heart.

It was too late for any expedition on the day of our arrival, and accordingly, after a short stroll, we returned to the sloop, and turned in for the night. Creeping feet-foremost into the crevice which was to accommodate four of our company, I was soon stretched out for sleep, but the comfort would certainly have been greater had it not been for the stove, the chimney of which served rather for ornament than for use. The most exciting moments, however, were those when the captain rose from his bunk and replenished the fire. Dense volumes of black smoke would then rise from the stove, and come curling into our strange bedplace, from which, as the end was blocked, they found no outlet. Mr. Schoultz and the lieutenant, who were lying with their heads turned inwards, would slowly crawl out half suffocated, and venture then remonstrances. 'What's the matter?' asks the captain. The lieutenant says something vigorous in Russian, and Mr. Schoultz complains in English of the smoke. 'Smoke!' says the captain, 'there's no smoke, it's steam from the kettle,' and, chuckling, he betakes himself to his bunk. We re-

sign ourselves to the carbonised air, and are soon fast asleep .

By daylight the next morning we were all astir. The samovar, the great brass tea-urn heated by charcoal—the foremost and most important of all the Russian household gods—was soon steaming, and, having fortified ourselves with glass after glass of hot tea, accompanied by chunks of cold beef and bread, we were quickly on shore, trailing off in different directions, singly or in pairs, in search of deer. It was my first experience of this species of sport, and Mr. Schoultz, an old hunter, took me under his protection, and initiated me into the mysteries of deer-stalking. A thin layer of snow was on the ground, but as the day wore on the weather became quite mild, and the melting of the snow upon our boots told us that the thermometer scarcely stood as low as freezing point. It was a magnificent country over which we tramped. Fine hills rose around us on every side, and as we climbed laboriously up their steep slopes, forcing our way through thick undergrowth, in spots perhaps never trodden by man before, we caught sight, between the hill-peaks, of pleasant glimpses of the sea on almost every side, for we were on a narrow neck of land jutting into the ocean. All the morning a thick mist hung over the valleys, and, though occasionally we heard the curious barking of a species of roebuck, which abounds in these districts, all efforts to approach them were fruitless. Later in the day the mist lifted, and several times we saw a small herd of roebuck grazing on the hillsides or in the valleys. But the conditions were unfavourable to suc-

cessful stalking, and always long before we could get within easy range we saw their white tails gleaming above the long grass, as they scampered off and disappeared from sight over the slope of a hill, a fruitless bullet or two speeding after them.

Despite the snowy prospect, it was warm work clambering over the hills amidst the thick undergrowth, but my companion had nevertheless donned his heavy deer-skin kukhanka, experience having taught him that in this guise he could approach much nearer to the herds than in any other hunting costume, the animals probably mistaking him for one of their own species. The adoption of this guise was not altogether without its risks, for it had happened more than once that a deer-stalker, catching a glimpse between the trees of what was undoubtedly a portion of a deer's hide, had taken aim and fired, with disastrous consequences to a fellow-sportsman.

At length we reached a little open brook, and regaled ourselves with a meal of cold beef and pierog, washed down with sparkling water, and, after a few more fruitless efforts to secure a prize, turned our faces disconsolately towards the boat. I am afraid it was not altogether with regret we learnt that the remaining members of the expedition had been no more fortunate than ourselves. It was late at night when Mr. Uien and the lieutenant arrived at the boat. In the endeavour to steer across country by compass they had lost themselves, and at nightfall had struck the shore miles away from the boat. Here they had fortunately struck on a little native Tungus

camp, where they obtained refreshment and temporary shelter. My fellow-voyager appeared with his legs and feet encased in a wonderful pair of skin moccasins, of a type seen nowhere out of Siberia. His own patent American hunting boots having given out, he had, by a mixture of bribery and the awe inspired by the Russian military grade of his companion, succeeded with some difficulty in inducing his Manza host to part with the moccasins off his feet.

It was pleasant to sit round the fire in the smoky little cabin and rest our weary limbs, while we related our adventures of the day, and told and listened to tales of travel and life in various quarters of the globe, though we were often inclined to curse the foolish ambition of the tower-builders of Babel, if it be true that to them we owe our multiplicity of languages. All of us, however, could converse in the English language with the single exception of the lieutenant, with whom those who knew no Russian had to communicate in fragmentary French. Uien and I had received, on our entrance upon the expedition, a new baptism, our English appellatives being declared unpronounceable by Russian tongues. Our names were translated into the language of the Tsar, according to the universal method of address which prevails in Russia, Uien becoming Kail Ivanovich, or Charles the son of John, and I, Lev Rikardovich. This style of address appears to anyone but a Russian exceedingly cumbersome and awkward, but it is nevertheless *de rigueur*. Even the Emperor appears in all official documents as Alexander

Alexandrovich, and in all classes of society it is exceedingly rare to hear anyone addressed by his family name. As Ivan, or John, is at least as common in Russia as in England, and as the fathers of half the Johns were Johns before them, one rarely finds oneself in a company of moderate size where there is not more than one 'Ivan Ivanovich' present. They are as plentiful as John Joneses in Wales, and give rise to no less confusion.

At an early hour we retired to rest, bent on retrieving our fortunes on the following day. But Mr Schoultz and I were again unlucky. Early in the day I succeeded in getting within easy range of a fine young roebuck, fired, and wounded it, but failed to track it, and lost my only chance of distinguishing myself. I rejoined my companion, and soon his practised eye discerned some light-coloured objects moving amid the trees on the slope of a far distant hill. We quietly made our way to within three or four hundred yards of the spot, and then clearly distinguished two fine large-antlered stags and two hinds. I remained behind, and left the chase to my more experienced comrade, watching him from behind a tree as he slowly crept up to the unconscious animals. He had scarcely got within firing distance, however, before an old stag scented danger, and lifted his nose in the air. Mr Schoultz fired at once, but without apparent effect, and the four deer bounded away over the brow of the hill. Disconsolately we walked forward, and surveyed the now deserted feeding-ground, but we soon relieved our disappointment with sips of whisky and draughts of hot tea, for we had to-day taken the pre-

caution of bringing with us a kettle improvised from an empty preserved-meat tin. There was no water to be found, but here and there a small patch of snow remained scarcely soiled, and little by little we filled our small kettle as the snow melted within it, and although the concoction may have gained an unwonted flavour from the fragments of dried leaves of the forest which had been put into the pot with the snow, it was refreshing enough.

After an unsuccessful but by no means uninteresting or uneventful day's sport, we proceeded boatwards along a ridge of snow-tipped hills. My companion told me that this ridge had been noted in the old days of the Finnish settlement as a favourite tiger-walk, and we had proceeded but a little farther when we saw winding along in the snow before us the tracks, evidently quite recently made, of a large tiger. There was the round pad of the foot with the four toe-marks before it, so clear and perfect, that even to a 'griffin' like myself the nature of the game was unmistakable. Some of the footprints were stained with blood, and the marks of human feet with those of a dog by the side, told us that Captain Hook had followed the crest of these hills before us. Speculating as to whether the two series of footmarks had any connection, we descended into a hollow, and soon a roebuck ran right across our path some distance ahead. We both fired, but our bullets dropped short, and immediately afterwards we heard a rustling as of some animal pushing its way through the long grass below us. It was probably a tiger, my companion said, but I was not anxious to investigate. It would cer-

tainly have been a triumph to enter Vladivostok with the rigid corpse of a tiger placed in a life-like position at the prow of our sloop, but there would have been a certain amount of risk attaching to the attempt. One of the pleasures of tiger-shooting in a rigid climate is the imposing style in which the successful hunter can make his entry into town. While the body of the tiger is stiffening with frost, it is placed in some becoming attitude—rampant or regardant, passant or couchant—and allowed to become rigid in this form. It is thus placed on the front of the hunter's sledge, and so rides triumphantly into town. Vladivostok has more than once turned out *en masse* to witness this strange sight.

On arriving at the last hill overlooking Stielok Bay, we saw no signs of the boat, but we soon discerned it lying in the next bend of the shore, known as Rasbomik Bay. Having bestowed our blessing upon the unknown member of the party who was responsible for leading us astray, we proceeded to the spot, and found that the sloop had been removed for the purpose of taking on board a fine stag and hind, which had fallen victims to the captain's skill. He had come upon three deer feeding together, and, armed with a Winchester repeater, he had killed one and wounded each of the others—one so badly that he was quickly able to overtake it and bring it down with a second shot. The captain's dog followed the third, and as it returned with fangs covered with blood, it was evident that all three deer had been brought down—no mean achievement. The dog, which was not a highly trained animal, resisted every



effort to induce it to lead its master to the spot where it had brought down the third deer, and the hope of finding it was abandoned. With regard to our tiger, the captain had, like ourselves, seen nothing more of it than its footprints, but he had baited the track with a richly poisoned mass of the deer's entrails. Next morning the bait had disappeared, but no dead tiger was found, and whether he or some unfortunate animal belonging to a smaller species of carnivora had partaken of the unwholesome feast we were unable to discover.

For the next two days and a half we continued to stalk the country with varying fortunes. On the third morning we shifted our ground, and anchored in the bay of a little island where some deserted huts on the beach marked the site on which a party of natives had encamped during the summer. We found the little island fairly stocked with game, for the smooth water between these isles and the mainland becomes at midwinter entirely frozen over, and the deer frequently cross over from Siberia on the ice and found new colonies. We had stayed only an hour or two on the island, and added but one icebuck to our stock of game, when the blue-peter was metaphorically hoisted, and we speedily set sail homeward bound. We had in all seven deer on board, three large antlered stags, a hind, and three icebucks—not a specially big bag, but not to be sniffed at, especially when it is remembered that two of the party were ‘griffins’ and contributed nothing to the score. At the worst, too, our bag provided us with a magnificent feast of fried deer’s liver during each of the last three days of our

expedition ; and subsequently, when on shore, we tested the qualities of the Siberian roebuck as a venison-producing animal, and found it immensely superior to anything we had tasted in that line since leaving England. We had confined our attentions entirely to deer, though we were told that there were, in the neighbourhood of Stielok Bay, some good natural pheasant preserves, and a few flocks of wild duck still remained, though thousands of their brethren had migrated southwards some weeks earlier. Had we been anxious for a more exciting species of sport we might have varied the monotony of tiger-hunting with an occasional search for a bear, of which some large species infest the locality

We started northwards, patiently reconciling ourselves to a long and tedious voyage beating against the wind. However, the thermometer stood many degrees higher than when we started on our little expedition. The headlands and capes, standing boldly out in the beautifully clear air, looked exceedingly pretty, and the little sloop, with her figure-head formed of a walrus skull—a trophy of one of the captain's whaling expeditions in Kamchatka—scudded over the water with a pleasant motion. After a time the wind, which for five days had remained steadily opposed to our return, veered round a little, and within ten hours we were once more at anchor in Vladivostok harbour.

## CHAPTER V

## VLADIVOSTOK—THE START

Ocean sledging—Wanted, snow and ice—A snowfall and a transformation—A jovial Ispravnik—‘Sei chas’—‘British arrogance’—A friend in need—Passports and *podorozhnayas*—Cattle lifting—An officer and a perfect gentleman—Exasperating delays—The last trip of the *Barhal*—Dismal forebodings—Parasites and kidnappers—A Russian dish—A purga—More delays—Off at last

THE traveller who has made up his mind to sledge his way homeward from Vladivostok usually begins his experiences with a taste of the pleasure of ocean sledging—starting away across the frozen harbour and skirting the coast as far as the mouth of the Suifun River, up which he glides to the little town of Rasdolnoi, connected in summer with Vladivostok by regular steam communication. But the winter of 1886–7 was somewhat late in setting in. Day by day we watched the slow progress of the ice, which at length began to skirt the shore in the most sheltered part of the bay, and day after day we listened with disgust as our resident friends congratulated each other on the mildness of the season. Our greatest cause of anxiety was, however, the absence of snow. Between Vladivostok and the Khanka Lake more than a hundred miles of road had to be traversed, and as the time of our departure drew near we feared

that we should be put to considerable expense and inconvenience in transporting our sledge, our baggage, and ourselves over this snowless track. Early in December we received the welcome news that the Khanka Lake was frozen over, and that in a few days it would be passable, but we had hardly been inspired by this intelligence when we heard that a violent storm had smashed up the ice on the surface of the lake, and nature had to begin all its work afresh.

At length on the morning of December 7 a prospect of unbroken whiteness from our hotel windows gladdened our eyes. Snow had fallen heavily during the night. At once the whole street locomotion underwent a change. Scarcely a wheeled vehicle was to be seen. Little roughly built sledges, with their contents raised but a few inches from the ground, served the purpose of waggon and cart; and pretty little light vehicles on runners took the places of carriages and traps.

Already for some days the hotel had been filled with military officers, waiting, like ourselves, for the winter road to open, that they might proceed to their respective stations up country, and among other expectant travellers was an Ispravnik, or governor of a district, about to return to his home in the north. He was a jovial boisterous soul, with none of the dignified reserve which might be expected to attach to one who filled so exalted an office. Indeed, he appeared to be the life and soul of the merry company with whom he was generally to be seen, and I often deeply regretted that my almost entire ignorance of the Russian language prevented me from appreciating the quips and

sallies with which he used to set the table in a room. After the first fortnight of our acquaintance with the Ispravnik, my comrade and I arrived at the conclusion that he never put off the disguise of liquor in which we had invariably seen him enveloped, but subsequently we met him on more than one occasion in a condition bordering on sobriety. However, this little failing on the part of the gallant officer did not prevent us from receiving with gratitude and pleasure an offer from him to accompany us as far as Khabarovka, to smooth the official path for us, and to present us to the Governor of the Maritime Province, who would probably give us papers which would remove all difficulties from our path for the rest of our journey.

Two days after the snowfall the Ispravnik sent a message to us bidding us be ready on the second day, and we at once communicated with the landlord on the subject of our papers. 'Sei chas' was the reply. 'Sei chas' always is the reply in Russia. It is supposed to signify 'at once,' or 'immediately,' but if the traveller who receives the answer imagines that his needs are going to receive immediate attention he will find himself grievously disappointed. Finding after twenty-four hours that not the slightest progress had been made, we took the matter out of his hands, and with the kindly assistance of a friend—Mr. Heidermann, of the Imperial Russian Telegraph Service—we ultimately brought it to a successful issue. We found it no easy task, and but for the patience and perseverance with which Mr. Heidermann devoted himself to our interests our difficulties would have been infinitely greater than they were.

From Shanghai we had each brought with us a docu-

ment emblazoned with the Royal Arms of England, requesting and requiring in the name of her Majesty all those whom it might concern to allow us to pass through Siberia without let or hindrance, and to afford us every protection of which we might stand in need. Our difficulties, however, began long before we reached Russian soil, the Russian Consul objected to *use* the passports. Her Majesty, he argued, might 'request' the Russian authorities to assist us, but she had no right to 'require' them to do anything whatever.

A similar case had occurred shortly before. The Russian Consul had refused to countersign a passport unless the obnoxious words 'and require' were struck out. The British Consul-General flatly refused to alter the passport, which was in the invariable wording of such documents, not only in England but in most continental countries, and the Russian Consul then expressed his willingness to countersign it if the holder would himself, on his own responsibility, strike out the words objected to. The traveller, however, stood on his rights as a Briton, and refused to make the alteration required, with the result that he had to proceed on his journey with a useless passport, in the hope of getting it *visé* in Japan. In our case the Consul, on learning that this highly important matter had been referred to the English Foreign Office, signed our passports and contented himself with entering a protest against the arrogance of her Majesty's demand.

When, however, we applied in Vladivostok for a permit to travel—a *podorozhnaya* as it is called—we discovered that

our English passports were by no means sufficient. We had first to lodge at the Chancellerie a Russian translation of the English passport, then to receive a document signed by the Governor of Vladivostok graciously according us permission to reside in the Tsar's dominions for the space of twelve months. Then, on presenting this at the Treasury, we could obtain our *podorozhnaya*.

A *podorozhnaya* is a document which enables the holder to demand from every station-master along a particular route the use of a certain number of horses at a fixed tariff of payment, and the services of a driver, known to the Russians as a *yamshtchik*, or, to give the word its colloquial pronunciation, *yemshik*, as far as the next station. It entitles the holder to free lodging at every station along that route, and, if he wishes it, to the use of a Government sledge or *tarantas* (a springless wheeled vehicle) on payment of a small fee. There are three kinds of *podorozhnayas*. The first is the courier's *podorozhnaya*, the holder of which simply flies. It is almost as much as a man's life is worth to delay a courier. The man holding this *podorozhnaya* can, if there are no Government horses at his disposal, demand the use of animals belonging to private individuals. It is not an unalloyed pleasure to travel with a courier, or even with a courier's pass. Our landlord at Vladivostok boasted that he had once made the journey thence to Petersburg in forty-one days, but I doubt if he enjoyed it. It means travelling incessantly, day and night, never staying anywhere long enough to obtain a decent meal or an hour's rest, and it is an experience which only men of extra-

ordinary physique could endure. The second class of permits to travel is the Crown *podorozhnaya*, which is obtainable by any military or naval officer or Government servant. Occasionally a Crown *podorozhnaya* is granted to a private individual, but very seldom. Its advantages over the third, or private *podorozhnaya*, consists in a priority of claim for horses. A merchant may have been waiting for hours, or even days, at a post-station, and just as he is about to start, a petty official may arrive, demand the only available horses, and leave the merchant to exercise his patience until another team arrives, when he will stand a good chance of experiencing a similar disappointment. The courier's and Crown *podorozhnayas* are given free to those who are considered entitled to them, for the private pass, which can be obtained by anyone who has a clean record at the police office, a tax is demanded of half a kopek per horse per verst. A kopek is about a farthing, and a verst is two-thirds of a mile, and as *podorozhnayas* are usually taken out for two horses, the tax thus amounts to about a shilling for every thirty-two miles. Two or three men, however, usually travel with one *podorozhnaya*, and the cost per man is thus reduced.

Relying on our own resources, we had come to Vladivostok without official introductions of any kind; and consequently the common or private *podorozhnaya* was the best we were able to obtain. At length, after repeated journeys to the Chancellerie and Treasury, and by dint of bringing the friendly influence of the *Ispravnik* to bear on the Governor, our papers were received in due order two



days after the date fixed for our departure, and it was definitely decided that a start should be made next morning. The caravan was to consist of two sledges, the Ispravnik being accompanied by an ex-military officer who had just been stripped of his uniform by court-martial and sentenced to a term of exile in Yakutsk on a charge of having used his troops for the purpose of making armed raids on the Koreans and stealing their cattle. Part of the sentence was that he should proceed to Yakutsk on foot, but friendly influence is often very effective in inducing Russian officials to wink their eyes, and, the exile having given his parole of honour that he would not attempt to escape, our friend the Ispravnik had offered to give him a lift as far as Khabarovka, where he could remain for the winter and proceed to his destination in the following spring, the Court having granted him an allowance—amounting, I think, to some fifteen or sixteen shillings a month—to live on during his exile. At first we felt a little doubtful about accepting the companionship of a man convicted of systematic ‘robbery with violence,’ but we were assured by a friend that the ex-officer was a ‘perfect gentleman,’ and we consoled ourselves with the reflection that more than one noble British family owes the origin of its fortunes to similar exploits.

The ice was now beginning to stretch across the harbour, and on December 10 the last merchant steamer of the season—the *Baikal*—left for the south. Our retreat was now cut off, and if the idea of abandoning our enterprise had occurred to us, we should have had to reconcile ourselves to four or five months’ residence in the frozen port

In former years the *Baikal* used to make one later trip from China and land her cargo on the frozen bay; but on one occasion the ice gave way, and several hundred pounds' worth of cargo went to the bottom, and the experiment was not repeated.

The accounts of Siberian travel which we had heard since our arrival had not been altogether reassuring, and we soon perceived that even the Russians themselves when bound for Europe appeared to infinitely prefer the ocean route. One excellent friend, who had been ten years in Vladivostok, drew for our delectation, with the kindest intentions, dark pictures of the fate in store for us if we persisted in our perilous enterprise. He informed us of the exact number of loathsome insects which would prey upon our bodies at every post-station, and pictured us as lost in some obscure village, unable to communicate with those about us or to make known our wants, powerless to obtain the necessary means for making our way backwards or forwards, a prey to robbers, in conflict with venal, unjust, and extortionate officials who would ill-treat us and imprison us till an expedition sent by our friends should come to our relief—if, haply, it came in time. In calmer moments he admitted that the picture was overdrawn; but he justified the excess of colouring on the ground of his anxiety that if we came to grief it should not be for want of warning. Another friend spoke to us in all seriousness of the danger of our being kidnapped by Cossacks and sent to work in the mines; and he advised us to wire to our friends from every telegraph-station along the route, so

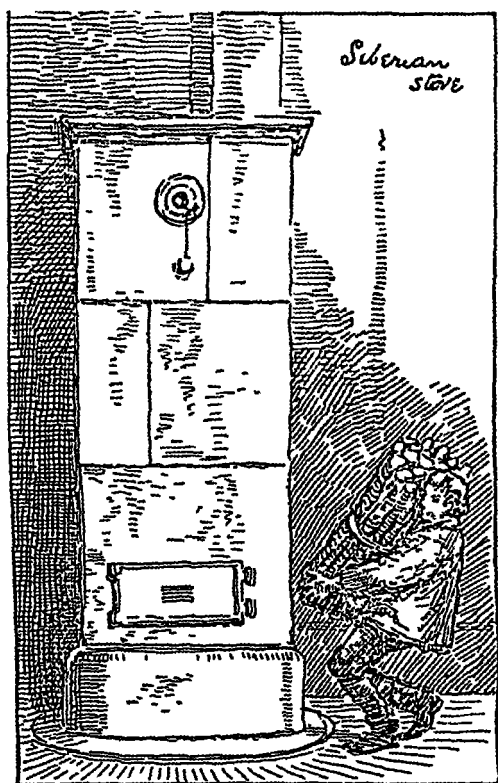
that in case of our being overtaken by this fate, our friends would know where to commence the search for our discovery. Old travellers, however, gave us reassuring accounts of the voyage, and we did not allow ourselves to be discouraged.

On the morning of Tuesday, December 14, all was prepared for a start. A supply of fresh provisions had been prepared under the direction of the landlord of the 'Golden Horn,' and duly frozen ready for transport. Mine host, who in the course of his wanderings had picked up perhaps half a dozen words of English, endeavoured with gusto to describe to us in our own language the feasts he had prepared for us. He got along swimmingly until he came to a dish which is known in his language as 'Rosbif'—not altogether dissimilar to another Russian dish, called in the vernacular 'bifshtek'. Mr Geletsky vainly racked his brains in the endeavour to call to mind the English name of this dish, and at last, turning to Mr Hagemann, who, though an Englishman, speaks Russian like a native, he asked, 'What is the English for "Rosbif"?'.

All, then, was prepared by Tuesday morning, but nevertheless we did not rise in a very hopeful frame of mind. During the night our rest had been disturbed by the howling of wind in the chimney, and when in the morning we looked out from the windows to see what was in store for us a strange sight met our eyes. A *punga* was raging—one of those fierce snowstorms which visit with especial violence the eastern shores of Asiatic Russia. Close in front of the hotel stretched a little mountain range of snow, with fantastically curled peaks, partially hiding the view from our

windows on the second floor. Very little snow appeared to be falling, but the air overhead was dense with fine white powder whirled up from the snowy ground to above the roofs of the houses, a quantity even insinuating itself through crevices of doors, creeping up staircases, and finding

a resting place almost at the feet of the huge stoves which of necessity occupy so large a portion of the space in Russian houses. Through this blinding snow a few hardy spirits fought their way to the hotel, and, while fortifying themselves for a further battle with the storm, cheered the hearts of the travellers with stories suggested by the scene without. This, we were told, was a



purga, but *minus* the cold—for the thermometer as yet registered only a few degrees of frost, and we were left to imagine the delights of spending two or three days in an open sledge in the midst of Khanka Lake in forty or fifty degrees of frost, with the biting wind driving the snow into

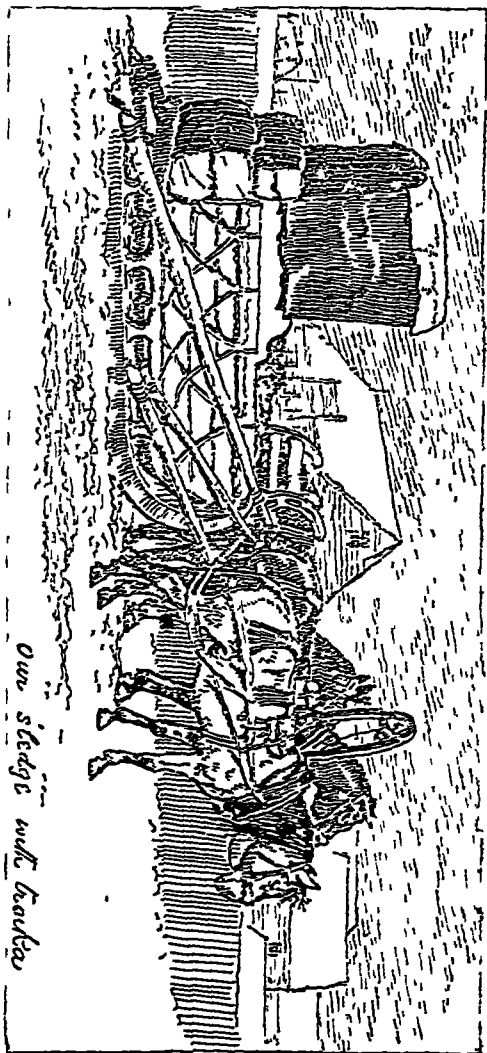
our faces, and with every vestige of the track obliterated—an experience which had happened to at least one resident of Vladivostok while returning home from Khabarovka.

All idea of starting that day had, of course, to be abandoned. Had we been willing ourselves to face the storm, it would have been impossible to obtain either horses or yemshik. Business, indeed, appeared to be suspended, the streets being utterly impassable for vehicles, and all but impassable for foot passengers. Before five o'clock in the evening the hotel, which was usually filled with convivial and noisy spirits till the small hours of the morning, was closed, and the servants were in bed, with the exception of one Chinaman who had been instructed to serve us with dinner in our cupboard-bedrooms. We soon, however, convinced the household that a profound knowledge of the Russian language is not necessary to the purpose of effecting a temporary reform in the Russian system of hotel management.

By the following morning the wind had subsided. Hundreds of Chinese and Koreans, as well as a good many Russians, were soon engaged in cutting pathways through the mountainous drifts of snow, and by midday locomotion once more became easy. It was arranged that our sledge should start at once, and that the Ispravnik and the cattle-lifter should follow us next day, catching us up before we arrived at the Khanka Lake. On a messenger being despatched to the post-station for horses, however, he returned with the comforting intelligence that they would be ready for us in two days. We repaired to the station, interviewed the station-master, and tried remonstrance and bribery, but

without avail. There were but four troikas, or sets of three horses, kept for Government posting purposes, and as numbers of travellers bound for neighbouring inland towns had, like ourselves, been waiting for the winter road to open, there was a demand altogether exceeding the supply. There were six Crown podorozhnayas and a greater number of private ones before us. Had we then possessed the experience of Siberian travel which we afterwards acquired, we should have at once gone in search of horses belonging to private individuals, which are nearly always to be obtained in Eastern Siberia for at most a little more than double fares, but as it was we resigned ourselves patiently to a further delay of two days. On the following morning the Ispravnik and the convict officer took their departure, and at nine o'clock on Friday morning, December 17, or the 5th according to the Russian Calendar, the first *troika*, or set of three, out of the thousand odd horses which were to carry us to the borders of civilisation appeared in sight. They were three shaggy, ungroomed animals, looking quite unfit for the work before them, but experience soon taught us that there is a wonderful degree of strength and staying-power in these Asiatic horses. Astride the first sat a yemshik bearing before him a huge duga—the wooden arch which forms so conspicuous a portion of the harness of every draught horse in Russia, from the Baltic to the Pacific. Brilliant with blue and red and green paint, it presented—when fastened to the shafts above the head of the central horse of our troika—a striking contrast to the dingy vehicle which for the next nine weeks was to be our home.

The packing of a Siberian posting sledge is a science which cannot be mastered in a single lesson, but with some difficulty our huge array of baggage was fitted on, competely filling the sledge up to the level of the driver's seat. Over the whole our thick folding mattress of raw cotton was spread, and having donned our furs we were soon comfortably ensconced amid pillows and rugs; and, waving farewells to the friends who had collected to witness the setting out of our expedition, we started off at a gallop on the first of the four hundred odd stages which were before us



*Our sledge with baggage*

## CHAPTER VI

## VLADIVOSTOK TO KHABAROVKA

Good bye to Vladivostok—The effects of the puiga—First experiences of road-sledging—Sledge bells—The first post-station—Tea drinking in Russia—Wellington bellows—Sledging by night—An unwelcome equine visitor—Tigrova—Rasdolnoi—Fall of the thermometer—Nikolsk—Kamen Ruboloff—An unexpected meeting and a welcome rest—The Khanka Lake—Marvellous effects of frost and storm—Slow progress—Frost-bitten yemshiks—Libellous loyalty—Russian emigrants—He had never heard of London—The Sungacha—The borders of China—The mails—An affectionate starosta—The Ussuri—The perfection of sledging—Siberian post-stations and peasants' homes—Kazakevitch—Arrival at Khabarovka

At last we had fairly started. The many disheartening obstacles which had arisen one after another in the way of our departure had all been overcome, and it was with a keen sense of relief and of pleasurable expectancy that we settled ourselves comfortably among our cushions as the horses turned their backs on Vladivostok and plunged up the steep ascent leading over the brow of the hills at the back of the port.

For the first five or six hundred yards our prospects did not look very encouraging. The effects of the recent puiga were everywhere painfully apparent. The slopes of the hills looking seawards, which had been exposed to the full



fully of the storm, were entirely denuded of snow, and the horses struggled painfully as they dragged the heavy sledge up the steep inclines, grinding the loose stones under our non-shod runners. Then in the valleys, where the snow had drifted to a depth of many feet, the animals found their work scarcely less toilsome. But one must not be too sensitive to the suffering of his horses if he would travel through Siberia with a quiet conscience.



In a little while the road improved. The sun shone out brightly, and the weather became so mild that even while reclining in a sledge we found a single sheepskin coat almost too warm for comfort. The exhilarating sensation of gliding over a smooth snow road, with three fresh, high-spirited horses galloping before us, raised our spirits to the verge of exultation, and a sledge journey through Asia appeared to us the most delightful of holiday excursions. As soon

as we were clear of the town the yemshik descended from his perch and loosened the clappers of two large bells suspended in the duga, and we had our first taste of the music which was to accompany us from the Pacific to the Uials. The sledge bells of Siberia are not the tinkling silver bells of Poe's fancy. They are often as large as an ordinary English dinner bell. They vary in number from one up to five or six, and are not always tuned to harmony. At first the ceaseless clanging is by no means agreeable, but after a time the ear becomes accustomed to it, and when on one or two occasions, while travelling with private horses, no bells were supplied to us, we felt that something was wanting to the due enjoyment of sledging.

The road lay for some miles through the midst of a dense wood, which at one time covered the whole site on which Vladivostok stands. Foolishly enough the founders of the Eastern port carried their work of clearing the ground to such an absurd extent that scarcely a single tree has been left standing within the limits of the town to afford shelter to the residents during the sultry summer days; but out beyond the hills the country must be exceedingly beautiful when the trees and bushes are clothed with foliage, and the whole country is green, and even as we saw it in winter, when the snow lay thick under the trees, whose branches had been swept clean by the high winds, the scene was by no means devoid of grandeur.

Every here and there pretty glimpses of the bays could be obtained from between the hills, the ice stretching away for a considerable distance from the shore. Wooden veist-

posts marked at every two-thirds of a mile the distance we had come, and the number of versts to the next station. Just after passing the nineteenth post we came in sight of the first of the many fine hotels whose accommodation we were to share. It was a wooden building of substantial size, with a large railed inclosure adjoining, in which were a number of horses. Outside were two or three sledges laden with baggage, and when we entered the guest-room we found it occupied by five other travellers. A Swedish merchant and an American whaling captain, travelling together, formed one party. We had already made their acquaintance in Vladivostok, and from them we obtained a hearty welcome, and an invitation to tea-drinking. They were proceeding to Nikolsk, a thriving little agricultural and manufacturing town some sixty miles from the seaport. We learnt to our chagrin that the era of delays was by no means over. Travellers were still many and horses few, and there was no prospect of our resuming our journey for twelve hours. We took advantage of the delay to enter more scientifically into the study of sledge-packing, and, having ordered the samovar, resigned ourselves patiently to wait for horses.

Without the samovar winter travelling in Siberia would be almost an impossibility. No one who has not had some experience of sledging in Russia can properly appreciate the wonderful sustaining power of good hot tea. Russians have long held the reputation of drinking the finest tea to be obtained out of China, and this reputation is thoroughly deserved. How far the fact is attributable to their import-

ing the product overland instead of by sea, and how far to the purchase by their merchants of the best and most expensive teas grown in China, is a question which must be left to experts; but of the fact itself no traveller in Russia or Siberia can be ignorant

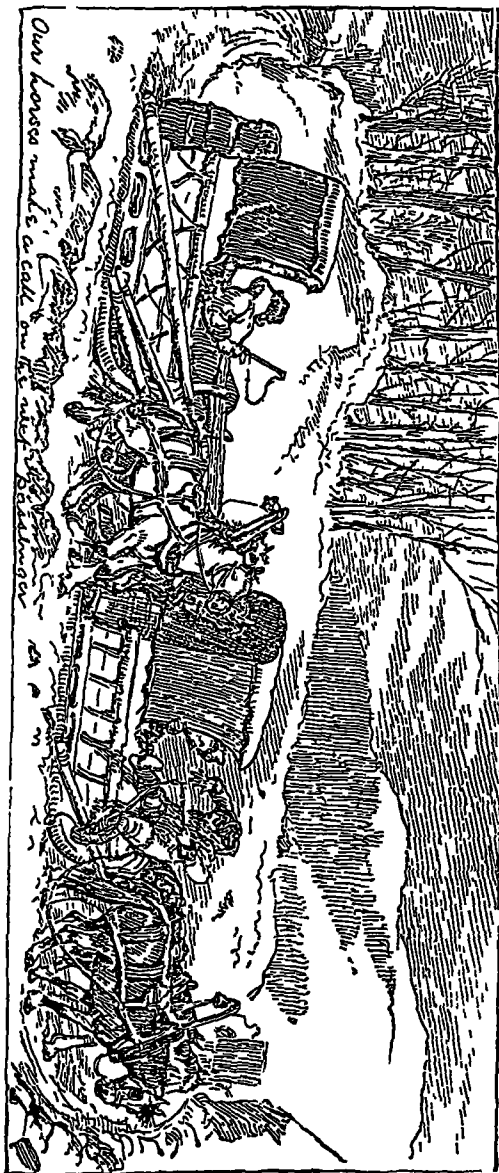
Much of the popularity of tea-drinking in Russia must, however, be attributed to that excellent institution the samovar. This is a large urn, with a receptacle for a charcoal fire beneath, and a chimney running right through the centre. However many the party may consist of, the teapot is generally very small, but the brew within it is so strong that a table-spoonful is enough for a half-pint of tea when poured into the tumbler and diluted with water from the boiling samovar. For tea is always drunk from glasses in Russia, generally without milk, and frequently with a slight flavouring of lemon. Novices accustomed to a handled cup sometimes complain that the hot tumbler calcines the tips of their fingers, but those who have given the system a fair trial will admit that tea loses half its flavour when drunk out of china or earthenware. Whatever else may fail, one can always obtain at any post-station or cottage in Siberia or Russia, on payment of a few kopeks, a boiling samovar, a teapot, and glasses. Should the charcoal fire refuse to burn well, he has the remedy at his command, as we learnt during our deer-shooting excursion. One evening the mate and cook announced with chagrin, when we were impatiently waiting for tea, that the charcoal fireplace in the samovar was clogged, and nothing would induce the fuel to burn. 'Have you tried the boot?' asked Captain

together to Nikolaevsk, while the third, a pure German, was bound for the neighbouring town of Nikolsk

It requires a certain amount of practice to sleep in a sledge on a rough, hilly road, with the knowledge that every two or three hours, or less, one must alight at a station, ascertain and pay the fare for the next stage, select and present to the yomshik a *poubonne* in accordance with his deserts, see fresh horses harnessed, and repack himself in the vehicle; and for the first night certainly the novelty of our situation drove all thoughts of sleep from our heads. Soon we found ourselves gliding, though but for a short distance, on the frozen sea. It was a curious sensation to be for the first time on a heavy sledge over deep water, and it was difficult to prevent the mind from speculating on the probable results of a crash through the ice. The three sledges, however, made the passage in safety, and a little later an amusing accident served, as we were not the sufferers by it, to give a more pleasant direction to our thoughts. In descending a steep hill our sledge, being somewhat heavily laden and carelessly driven, took charge of the horses and rushed down upon the sledge in front, catching it just at the foot of the hill. Then came an alarming crash. Our centie horse thrust his head completely through the canvas hood of the forward sledge and paid an unwelcome visit to our German friend, who was seated within. A wild confusion ensued in the darkness. It was some time before the three yomshuks, by dint of much exertion and strong language, succeeded in separating the vehicles, and at three in the morning we

pulled up safely at the door of the lonely post-station of Tigiova, so named because it stands in the very midst of a tiger-infested district

Our German friend treated the little accident which had occurred to him as a huge joke, but when we discovered that he was travelling by perekladnaya, and the sledge was not his own, we were less surprised at this. The front sledge, belonging to the two travellers bound for Nikolaevsk, was more seriously damaged, and its



occupants were compelled to stay for repairs. In half an hour fresh horses were attached to our sledge, and we were once more under way.

Soon after daybreak we rattled down a steep hill and entered the little village of Rasdolnoi—the port on the Suifun River from which in summer a little light-draught steamer runs regularly to Vladivostok and back. Here something of a surprise awaited us. Standing at the door of the post-station was Lieutenant Ratzul, our companion in the trip to Stielok Bay, who had been sent with his company into the wilds on a wood-cutting expedition. Having exchanged greetings and partaken of a hasty breakfast we remounted our sledge.

The sheltering hills of Vladivostok were now left far behind, and the difference in temperature became very perceptible. The thermometer fell for the first time below zero. The interior of our sledge hood became white with hoar-frost, and every heavy jolt brought down on our heads a miniature snowfall, two long icicles suspended themselves from my companion's moustache, and effected a junction with the collar of his shuba, while the long hair of the horses became covered with frozen perspiration. No difficulty was now experienced in obtaining horses, and, waiting just long enough at each station to exchange our tired beasts for fresh ones, and twice to snatch hasty meals, we pushed on for the Khanka Lake. Though a pretty country, constantly ascending and descending steep hills, we glided along, sometimes fast, sometimes slow, the speed varying in direct proportion to the energy of the

yemshik and the strength of his lungs From the cliffs above, the little rising town of Nikolsk, lying in a beautiful valley, presented a pretty picture, with signs of cultivation peeping through the snow in the fields around, and each post-station was generally the centre of a little village of log huts

Towards three o'clock on the following morning we approached the village of Kamen Ruiboloff, or the Fisherman's Stone—a military station and port on the south coast of the Khanka Lake Had we chosen the summer for our trip we should now have had nothing more fatiguing before us for two thousand miles than a steamboat journey, but nevertheless all the disadvantages were not on our side Siberian river steamers have not gained the reputation of being the most comfortable in the world, and at least in our sledge we were free from mosquitoes and other pests of summer travelling The nights were now moonless, but the starlight reflected upwards from the snowy landscape afforded us quite sufficient illumination for comfortable travelling And, indeed, throughout the whole of our journey, even when for days the sky was overcast with thick snow-clouds, we never once experienced darkness dense enough of itself to render travelling uncomfortable or dangerous Two or three times, it is true, we were warned against undertaking certain passages by night, but these were spots in which, even in broad daylight, one's sense of security was not very strong

On entering the travellers' room in the post-house of Kamen Ruiboloff we found it crowded with sleeping



voyagers, among whom we recognised several acquaintances of Vladivostok. Reclining on the only two wooden benches, were our friend the Ispravnik and an elderly Russian officer, while lying about the floor in all directions were other sleeping forms, among whom were a young Austrian who had left the seaport to seek his fortune in Irkutsk, and the gentlemanly cattle-lifter. The Ispravnik rose as soon as we entered, and although he offered us a courteous welcome he did not look particularly pleased to see us. Presently from a recess divided off from the main room by the huge Russian stove, emerged a young army doctor and his newly married wife, travelling together to Mikhaelo-Seminovska, a military station on the Amur River.

We learnt that the whole party occupied four sledges, and as there were just four troikas at the station, it would be necessary for us to remain until these horses had accomplished a journey of twenty-one miles, returned, and rested sufficiently to undertake another trip. We were rather rejoiced at this misfortune. Forty-two hours' travelling without any sleep beyond an occasional five minutes' nap, had rendered the prospect of an enforced rest far from unpleasing. Slowly the large party refreshed themselves and prepared sulkily to resume their journey. Had they not claimed the horses they knew one team would be taken by us, and although it was evident that they would have preferred to complete their night's rest before proceeding, they had to be up and off. By five o'clock the four sledges had driven away, and we were left in undisturbed possession of the station.

The hardness of our couches did not prevent our sleeping soundly, and day was pretty far advanced when we were awoken by a company of soldiers marching past the station and singing a chorus. The village itself, with its log huts, offered but little to attract the traveller, and, having ordered a dinner of roast goose, we occupied the intervening time in rearranging our sledge with a view to enhancing its comfort. At noon the spirit thermometer, carefully fastened in the felt hood of the sledge, recorded but two or three degrees of frost, though the great sheet of ice, stretching away to the horizon, told of much severer weather in the nights of the early winter.

At length at four o'clock in the afternoon three tired horses were harnessed to our sledge, and we were soon scudding over the ice. We appeared to be in a new world. The low-lying land on the banks of the lake was soon scarcely visible. All around stretched a vast expanse of snow-covered ice, with here and there patches swept bare by the wind, looking like green bottle-glass as the horses' hoofs clattered over it. A violent puuga, which had occurred while the water was but freshly frozen, had produced some grand effects, piling the ice into long hilly ranges rising twenty or more feet above the level of the lake, with huge glassy jagged masses jutting out through the thick snow which had since fallen. The sledge-track, marked out on either side by branches of trees stuck in the snow at distances of a few feet, could be seen winding away for many miles ahead.

But apart from these occasional patches the surface of

the lake by no means presented the glassy smoothness of a frozen English pond, and the pace of the tired horses

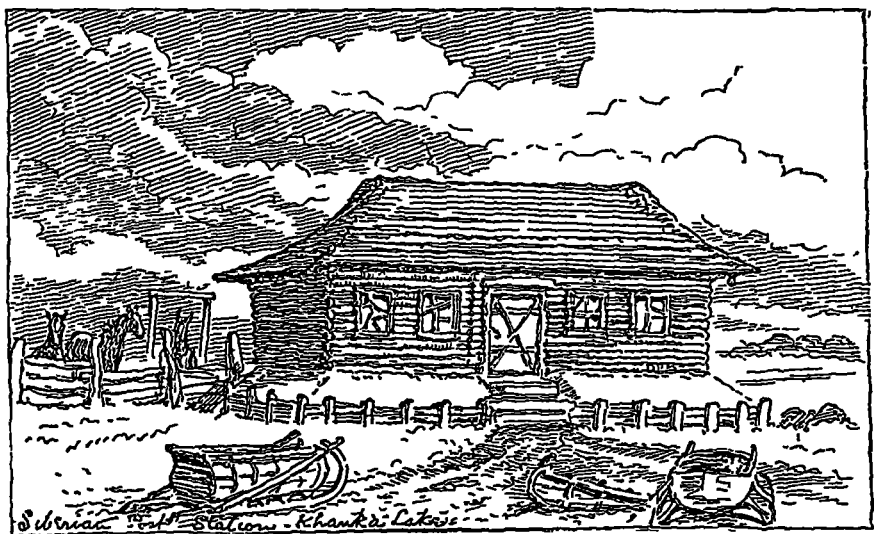


became miserably slow. Although nominally the distance from Kamen Ruboloff to the next station was twenty miles, the ridges piled up by the storm had necessitated the making of long détours in the track, which considerably augmented the distance, and nearly four hours elapsed before we again approached the shores of the lake in the direction of a lonely house. In front of this station were two or three broken-down sledges. From

the shores of the lake the land stretched away to the horizon perfectly flat with never a tree, and, apart from the one house, with no sign of human habitation; the

whole scene conveying a sense of indescribable desolation

We were received by a small boy, who told us that the station-master was away, and that there would be no horses till the morrow. At first we imagined that this youngster was for the time being the sole inhabitant of the district, but presently there emerged from the yemshuks'



room two or three sledge-drivers with faces so badly scarred that in our ignorance we came to the conclusion that they had been relieving the monotony of existence by a free fight. Subsequently we discovered that these marks were caused by frost-bite. Sitting for hours on the box, driving in the cold wind night and day, and occasionally impeding their circulation by falling asleep in the keen wind, very few of the yemshiks get through the winter without losing

the skin of their noses and cheeks. In the colder parts of our journey we scarcely saw one driver whose face was not covered either with scabs or with patches of pink new skin which showed where the frost-bitten cuticle had peeled away. However, these slight cases of frost-bite are, as I was to learn by experience, more disfiguring than painful, and Siberian yemshiks pay but little regard to them.

Formerly the route lay along the western shores of the lake, and the stations now used on the eastern coast are of a better class than the older buildings. The travellers' room at Lifu, the first station, is quite a spacious, lofty apartment, furnished with a few Vienna bent-wood chairs, but no fire had been burning in the great stove for some hours, and we found our resting-place for the night desperately cold and cheerless. And a meal of half-frozen bread and canned meats hardly served to enliven our spirits. The station-master, or *starosta* as he is usually termed by courtesy—the title implying the head man of a village—had, like most of his class in Eastern Siberia, displayed his loyalty by decorating the walls of his guest-room with lithographic portraits—for the most part libellous caricatures of the Tsar and the Imperial family. We counted as many as sixteen portraits of his Majesty alone. Here he was represented in his coronation robes; there at his wedding ceremony, yet again amicably joining hands with the Emperors of Germany and Austria, then in the bosom of his family, on horseback, reviewing his army, driving in an open carriage, and under a dozen other conditions of daily life.

Shortly after nightfall a little caravan of Russian emigrants halted on the shore of the lake in front of the station, and were soon crouching round fires cooking their evening meal. In their dirty sheepskin clothes, with unkempt hair, and faces long innocent of soap and water, they looked a forbidding lot, though doubtless they were harmless enough. We felt uncertain, however, about leaving all our worldly goods at their mercy while we slept within the building, and it was agreed that one should spend the night in the sledge and one in the house.

At nine the next morning horses were announced, and we entered on another long slow drive over the lake. Our Russian friends, including the Ispravnik who had promised us that under his protection we should 'fly' to Khabarovka, were travelling by easy stages and leaving us to follow from every station with their tired horses. A drive of five-and-twenty miles brought us to Santakhesa, but the place designated by this high-sounding name proved, like Lifu, to consist of a single house—the post-station. The old story of 'no horses till the morrow' was repeated, but we found ourselves in more comfortable quarters. Some of the yemshiks appeared to be married men, and in the evening quite a large party of men and guls were dancing to the music of some stringed instrument.

The station-master, too, paid us a visit, accepted an invitation to tea, and showed himself extremely curious to know what two foreigners, with but a rudimentary knowledge of the Russian language, could possibly want in Siberia. Our *podorozhnayas* were taken for Blagovestchensk. Were

we going to remain there? No, we were going farther. Irkutsk? Farther. Tomsk? Farther. At each new answer our guest opened his eyes still wider. 'Petersburg?' 'Farther, London.' 'Ah! Ni zna!' He knew Petersburg, but he had never heard of London. No travellers who had put up at his station had ever been bound for such a place.

Early in the afternoon of the following day we hailed with delight the end of our long lake journey. At first the marvels of the scene, the piled-up masses of ice with jagged edges glittering in the bright sunlight, and the novel sensation of gliding over the surface of a vast expanse of water, almost out of sight of land, had been interesting enough; but by the third day the novelty had worn off, and there was something exasperating in the knowledge that, at the rate of speed we were making, it would take something over twelve months to land us in Europe.

Nearing the end of a stage of close upon thirty miles, we were surprised to come upon a pool of open water, and upon approaching it we found it was formed by the current of the River Sungacha, which had proved too swift for the winter yet to fully overcome. A little group of Manchurian huts on the opposite bank of the river reminded us that we were now on the border line of the two great empires of Russia and China, and that in two minutes we could return to the land which we had left two months before. For the next 1,600 miles our journey lay along the border line of these two empires, for not until we reached the little town of Ust Stalka, situated just at the spot where the rivers Argun and Shilka combine their

forces to form the great Amur, should we turn our backs on China

Just where the waters of Lake Khanka empty themselves into the Sungacha River, to find their way to the ocean by way of the Ussuri and the Amur, a little Russian village has grown up, and as we drew up at the post-station in this village after a drive of nearly thirty miles, a scene of unusual bustle and activity lay before us. Yemshiks and station-master were busily engaged in harnessing horses to four large open sledges, and loading these vehicles with huge heavy leathern bags fastened with chains. These proved to be the mail-bags bringing letters and parcels to Vladivostok from Europe and Western Siberia.

Within the station the postman and a young soldier, whose uniform with yellow facings and broad yellow bands down the sides of the trousers proclaimed him to be a Cossack officer, were getting their midday meal. Soon they took their places in one of the sledges, and the cavalcade prepared to start. The horses were fresh, spirited animals, and before the men had fairly taken their seats one team dashed off, and the station-master, who was attempting to hold them, was rolled over in the snow, narrowly escaping a parting kick from the retreating hoofs. As soon as the man had pulled himself together, we presented ourselves to him with a polite request for horses. The station-master's reply was anything but polite. He had evidently been indulging in a good many nips of vodka during the morning, and the roll in the snow had not sweetened his temper. Horses! of course there were no



horses, but when we intimated that we were willing to pay high rates for private horses rather than not proceed, the fellow's effusiveness became even more embarrassing than his ill-temper. He was not a man of prepossessing appearance. Siberian villagers are not as a rule lavish in the matter of soap and water, and this man was no exception. His face was decorated with a shaggy, unkempt, dirty beard, reeking with stale vodka, and my companion, who was conducting the negotiations, viewed with evident alarm a desire on the part of the station-master to seal the bargain with a chaste salute. It takes a deal of travel in foreign climes to make an Englishman take kindly to the custom of kissing between man and man—a custom which is very general in Russia.

Our course now lay for some distance along the banks of the Sungacha, occasionally crossing from loop to loop of the serpentine river over tracks marked in the wide plain, like those on the lakes, with small branches of trees to which the dead leaves still clung. These track marks extend at intervals along the whole route through Northern Asia, on all rivers, lakes, and plains—wherever, in fact, there is the slightest fear that a snowstorm may obliterate the track and cause danger or inconvenience to the traveller. Every year several hundreds of thousands of these branches have to be set up anew; and if the reader considers the amount of labour this alone entails, he will be able to form some idea from this one little fact in connection with the Siberian postal service, how vast an undertaking it is that the Russian Government have to maintain in order to

keep up communication with their eastern shores. We were told, and could readily believe, that the low tariff charged for posting and the rates for letter carriage did not nearly cover the cost of the elaborate and, on the whole, admirable system, which enables the traveller at a minimum of trouble and cost to cover the ground at a speed perhaps unknown with horses in any other part of the world.

At night we were once more stopped for want of horses. Though we were still far enough from civilisation to have little fear of thieves, we judged it inadvisable to leave our sledge in the open street all night unguarded, and still we continued by turns to perform a night of sentinel duty by sleeping in the sledge, though the thermometer now fell in the early morning as low as twenty degrees below zero Fahrenheit.

Next day we reached the mouth of the Sungacha, and were soon scudding along the ice on the Ussuri, a broad river flowing through some beautiful country. Our troubles were for a time at an end, and we experienced the perfection of Siberian winter travel. The smooth ice of the river, covered only with a thin layer of snow, formed an excellent track for our sledge, and occasionally the monotony of the travelling between the low banks was relieved by a short cut across country—up hill and down dale, through thick woods and over plains. For nearly four hundred miles we travelled day and night, only remaining long enough at each station for the harnessing of fresh horses, or to thaw out our provisions and partake of a hasty meal, or refresh ourselves with tumbler after tumbler of hot tea. In forty-

eight hours we covered a distance of over 290 miles—a record which we were never able to beat until we came to the great steppe between Tomsk and the Ural, where we succeeded for some days in keeping up an average of nearly 160 miles in twenty-four hours. Many travellers boast of having kept up for a week at a time an average of 200 miles a day, and certainly in Western Siberia, where one is never delayed for lack of horses, there is nothing impossible in such a record being made by an ordinary traveller, and even greatly exceeded by a courier, but for our parts we were not ambitious enough to sacrifice all comfort for the purpose of attempting to beat the record in the matter of speed.

The post-stations along the Ussuri were for the most part much more primitive than those to which we had become accustomed. In some cases the travellers' room was divided off from the sleeping and dwelling apartment of the station-master and his family merely by a loose, hanging curtain, from behind which crowds of little boys and girls would peer at us as we drank our tea. For nearly every station-master appeared to be blessed with a large family; and as a rule boys and girls, mother and father, appeared to occupy a single room, a second apartment being devoted to the use of all the drivers and their families. For the life of an Eastern Siberian yemshik or station-master, which may perhaps be taken as a fair type of the life of the lower class—the great bulk—of Siberians, appears to allow of no room for comfort, and but little for decency. Passing at night through the family quarters to

the guest-room, as we frequently had to do, we often found the whole bedless floor covered with the slumbering forms of men, women, and children, the latter very scantily clothed, as, despite the cold without, the huge stove raises the temperature to the verge of suffocation. The sanitary arrangements of the houses, too, defy description. In winter the severe frost is, of course, an excellent temporary purifier, but the fact that infectious diseases frequently prevail in the summer is not difficult to understand.

A few years ago a Siberian post-station was a by-word in Russia for dirt, parasites of all descriptions, and general discomfort. Lately, however, great changes for the better have been effected, and from a recent amalgamation of the postal, telegraph, and post-house services under a single department, still further improvements are expected. Formerly travellers had occasionally to share their accommodation with cattle and horses, but now at every station at least one room is reserved for their exclusive use, and periodical inspections are made for the purpose of insuring that the Government regulations for the comfort and quick transport of passengers are duly observed. In the newly erected stations the guest-rooms are quite spacious and lofty, and in many instances they are furnished with little luxuries in the shape of antimacassars and simple art decorations which one would hardly expect to find in the desolate regions of Northern Asia.

Here, however, on the Ussuri, the stations were among the worst we encountered. More than once, after arriving hungry and tired, we were driven back to our sledges by the

impossibility of taking a meal in the fetid atmosphere of the guest-room cuttained off from the family bedroom, and at other stations the overpowering heat to which the temperature had been raised by the enormous stove rendered us only a few degrees less uncomfortable

Soon after nightfall on Christmas Eve we arrived at the little village of Kazakevitch, twenty-six miles south of Khabarovka. We learnt that the Ispravnik and his party had only just started away, while as for the young doctor and his bride we had already left them far behind. There were no horses for us until the morrow, and our hopes of an entire day's rest on Christmas Day were therefore disappointed. Finding there was a telegraph-station in the village, we decided to take advantage of the opportunity to wire homewards and make known our whereabouts at the festive Christmas season, and, guided by the stationer, who lighted the way with a lantern, I trudged through the snow to the telegraph office at the farther end of the village. Although the evening was yet young, everybody was in bed, and it was only after belabouring the door for a good ten minutes that we obtained admittance. I handed in my message, written plainly in English, but the officer politely signified that he understood no language but his own, and that it was contrary to regulations for him to accept a telegram the purport of which he did not understand. I returned to the post-station, and soon afterwards, it being my turn for sentry duty, composed myself comfortably to sleep in the sledge. At two in the morning I woke shivering under my furs. A fierce cold wind was blowing through

the sledge, and the Siberian traveller soon learns that in a frosty climate it is the wind that tells. During the prevalence of the greatest cold the air is, as a rule, absolutely still, and one can then travel far more comfortably than when facing a steady breeze with the thermometer twenty, thirty, or even forty degrees higher.

At about noon on Christmas Day we reached the mouth of the Ussuri, and the great Amur opened out before us. Immediately in front of us, where the cliff rose high above the water, on the opposite bank of the Amur, stood Khabarovka, the capital of the Primorsk or Maritime Province, and the military headquarters of Eastern Siberia. A few minutes later our bells were silenced, and we dashed up the steep bank and drew up in the courtyard of the Khabarovka Hotel.

## CHAPTER VII

## KHABAROVKA TO BLAGOVESTCHENSK

The capital of the Primorsk—A miserable hotel—A Christmas dinner—Shtchee and cutlets—Beware of officials—Driving tandem—The Amur River—A dreary steppe—Amid night collision—Thirty-six hours through falling snow—Radde—A pleasant meeting—The family sledge—Racing on the road—A long cold drive by night—A frosty supper and an altercation—No snow—A station-master takes a fancy to our sledge—An encounter and a victory—We proceed with five horses—The battle renewed—Another victory and a rough ride—A drive in a tahtas and a frozen nose—Entry into Blagovestchensk

THOUGH named after a Cossack general who led a small army of adventure from Europe to the Amur in the middle of the seventeenth century, Khabarovka has been in existence scarcely thirty years, and numbers at the present time probably less than three thousand inhabitants. It is a well-chosen site for the headquarters of the Maritime Province, being situated just about halfway between the two seaports of Nikolaevsk and Vladivostok, and in summer being easily accessible from either. To the traveller, however, it offers but few attractions. Its one hotel was, perhaps with a single exception, the most uncomfortable and the worst provided of any at which we put up during the whole of our travels. The scale of charges, it is true, was not very high,

but the accommodation provided would have been dear at any price. The only room which we could procure opened by swing-doors, which did not meet, upon a little billiard-room. Its furniture consisted of one wooden couch-bedstead, a small table, and two or three chairs. With washing accommodation it was entirely unprovided, and it was with considerable difficulty that we obtained temporary possession of a basin and jug containing considerably more ice than water. For eight days we had not undressed, and these were all the appliances we could get for a bath. However, we removed the stains of travel as well as the means at our disposal would allow, and proceeded to the dining saloon to eat our Christmas dinner.

The Russian Christmas is of course twelve days later than the English, and therefore, having no expectation of finding a seasonable feast provided, we were not disappointed when the dinner proved to consist of shtchee, or cabbage soup, and a greasy kind of rissoles always known in Russia—or at least in Siberia—for some inscrutable reason, as ‘cutlets.’ The Russians are good hands at soups, and even among the poorest classes a dinner is not considered complete without it. Shtchee is excellent when properly made, but when one has been living five weeks in an hotel, where shtchee is served either for lunch or dinner at least ten times in each week, even cabbage soup may become monotonous, while no one who has tasted a ‘cutlet,’ as served in a Siberian hotel, will be likely to hanker after a repetition of the feast. It was our sad experience, however, that whenever we reached a small Siberian town and congratulated



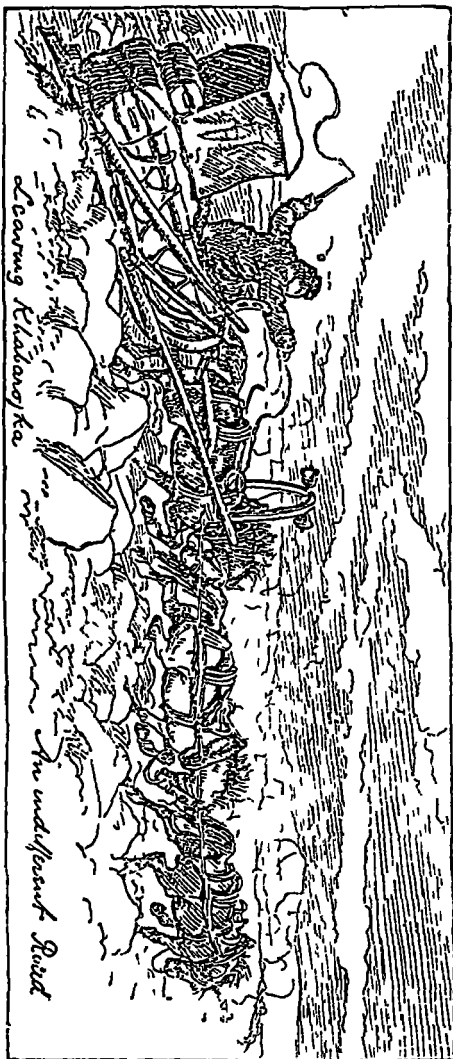
ourselves on the possibility of obtaining a change from the rough and ready fare of the road, 'shitchee and cutlets' always formed the bill of fare.

We soon discovered that an adjoining room to our own was occupied by our friend the Ispravnik, the ex-officer convict, and the young Austrian. But after exchanging greetings we left the Ispravnik to his own devices, and did not remind him of his promise to introduce us to the Governor-General. Eight days of Siberian travel had been sufficient to convince us that we were quite able to make our way from one end of Russia to the other without official aid or protection of any kind whatever beyond that which our papers entitled us to demand. The Ispravnik's 'assistance' had thus far consisted in persistently getting in our road and clearing every station of horses, so that a journey which has often been covered in four days had taken us more than eight to accomplish. We decided that in future we would rely upon ourselves, and have nothing to do with officials if we could help it, and to the end of our journey we never saw any cause to regret our decision.

In the afternoon we strolled through the broad streets of the town, flanked by wooden houses, and examined its one striking building—a large Greek church of the Byzantine order, commonly adopted in ecclesiastical architecture throughout the whole of Siberia and the greater part of European Russia. From pinnacles to base the church had been painted in the most glaring tones of green and red and ultramarine, and though the effect was anything but artistic it was certainly very dazzling. At the telegraph

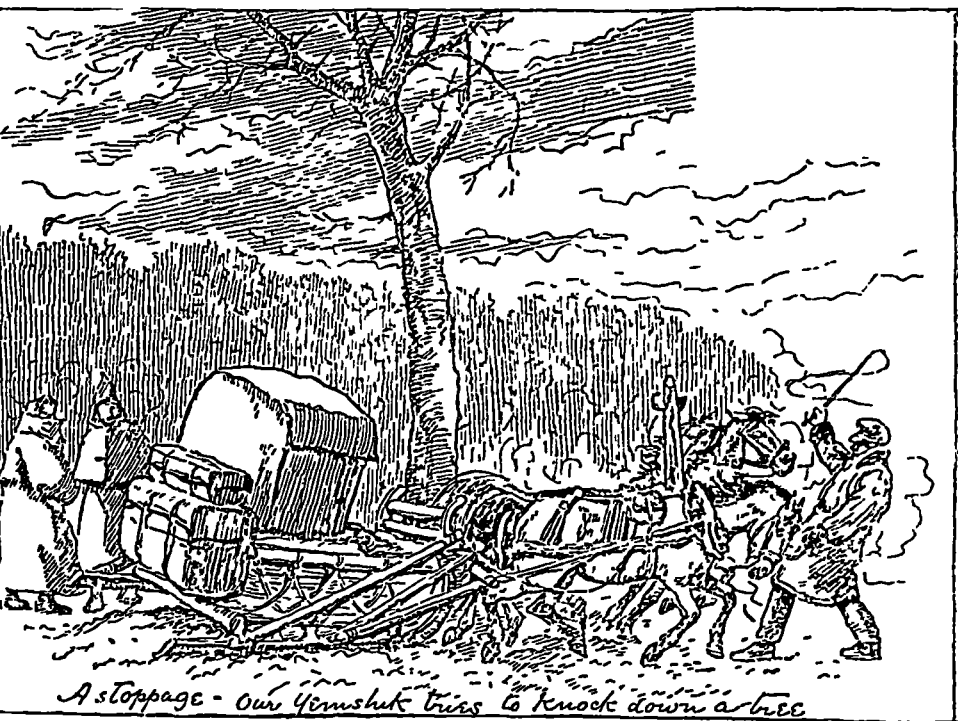
office we made the acquaintance of a young Teutonic Russian telegraphist named Doring, who told us that he would himself in a few days be starting by sledge for Petersburg. Nearly two months later we met at Tomsk, whence we journeyed together to Moscow.

A very brief survey of Khabarovka convinced us that it offered no inducements to a lengthened stay, and, having ordered from our host a fresh supply of frozen provisions, we amicably settled the vexed question as to which should sleep on the bed and which on the floor, and prepared ourselves by a long night's rest for the fatigues of our next stage.



On sending in the morning to the post-station we were

informed that no horses were to be had until next day, but on going ourselves to the station we found grave reason to suspect that this was a ruse on the part of our hotel keeper to obtain from us another day's bill, and by four o'clock in the afternoon we were slowly descending the steep cliff to the river. Our three horses were now, for the first and only time,



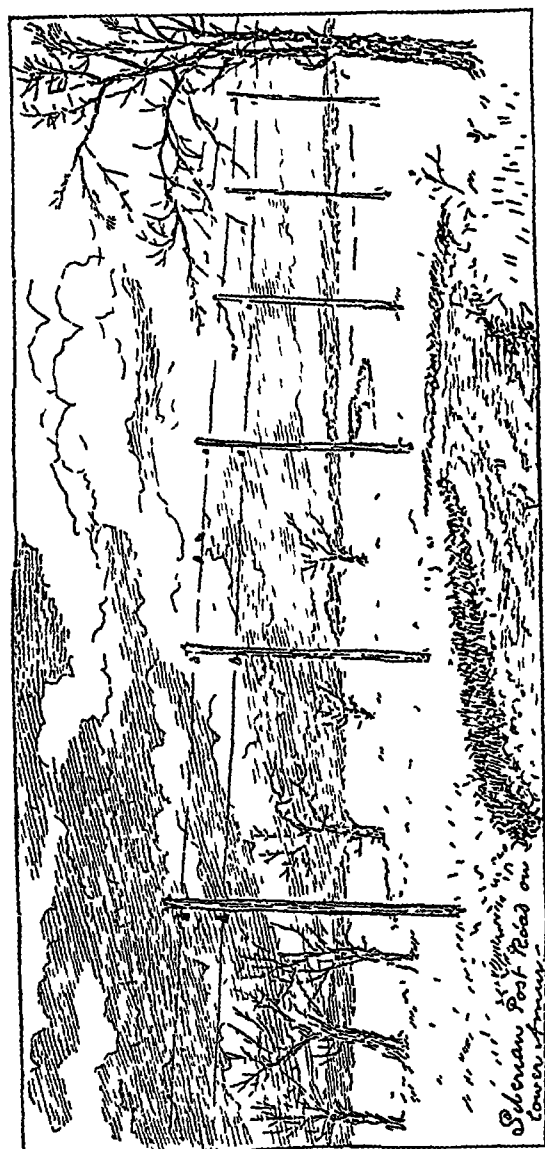
harnessed tandem, and so loose was the system of coupling that our equipage wound away before us like a circus procession. Nevertheless, with a dexterous jerk of the whip, the yemshik sent the long lash curling about the ears of the leader, and we were soon rattling and jolting over the rough ice, and picking our way between jagged

masses raised by the turgid waters at the meeting of the two rivers. The setting sun, shining full in our eyes, reminded us that we had at last begun to make headway, for the first six hundred miles of our journey had been a mere beating up into the course, and at Khabarovka we were considerably more to the eastward than when we started.

For mile after mile the surface of the Amur presented the appearance of a gigantic *chevaux de frise*, masses of jagged ice sticking up everywhere, as though after the first frost the icy surface had been broken up into thousands of fragments, which had afterwards become roughly welded together by succeeding frosts. We were glad when at length we ran up the bank and travelled for some distance on land. Somewhere about midnight, as we were lying back on our mattresses and comfortably dozing, we suddenly felt a heavy shock, and heard the horses plunging violently. On looking up we found that the driver, who had probably fallen asleep on the box, had driven off the road, and had brought the sledge smartly into collision with the trunk of a tree. One poor horse was jammed so tightly in between the sledge and the tree that we feared he must be badly injured, but after leaving our bed and helping the yemshik to pull the vehicle back into the road, we found that no serious damage was done.

For the next two days our route lay principally across a vast plain on the northern bank of the Amur. Some stunted trees, still covered with decayed leaves, and the long line of telegraph poles which marked the posting road,

alone relieved the dreary monotony of the vast white plain.



*Siberian Post Road on  
Crown of Snow*

Travellers were few, and almost the only living creatures we met between the stations were a herd of fine horned cattle and then drivers. On the second day the sky clouded over, and for thirty-six hours we continued to travel amidst thickly falling snow. The cold was, however, too great to allow the flakes to melt, except where they actually fell on the face, and although sledge, mattress, and rugs were half buried in the cold white fleece, the discomfort was not

so great as might be imagined. Our sledge was provided

with a felt curtain which could be drawn over the open front in snowy weather, but this of course entirely excluded the view, and we put up with the snow rather than travel day after day seeing nothing of the country through which we were passing. When at last the snow ceased the temperature slowly began to fall. Horses never failed us. Day and night we pushed on, stopping but twice a day to thaw out and eat our frozen bread and meat, or to drink a bowl of cabbage soup, prepared by the station-master's wife for her husband and family, and once or twice more to warm our blood with tumblers of overland tea or a jar of rich milk with a slice or two of black bread.

On the third day we entered the little village of Radde, and a Russian in the uniform of a telegraph officer accosted us and asked us to deliver a letter at a village a hundred versts or so away, towards which we were proceeding. To our delight we presently discovered that he knew something of English, having spent some months in Vladivostok. He told us that the last English traveller whom he had encountered was Dr Henry Lansdell, in whose company he had journeyed to Nikolaevsk in the summer of 1879. From Dr Lansdell I had been fortunate enough to obtain a letter recommending me to all the friends whom he made during his travels in Asiatic Russia, and on my presenting this letter to the officer he expressed himself delighted to hear news of one of whom he entertained pleasant recollections. The unexpected meeting formed a pleasing incident in the journey through this sparsely inhabited district, and it was resolved, at the officer's suggestion, to celebrate the

occasion with a bottle of vodka. The liquor produced by the station-master unfortunately proved distasteful to English palates, but we found the yemshiks took to it very kindly, and as under its influence they usually urged their horses to an extra degree of speed, the money proved well invested.

At daylight on the following morning we reached a little village called Skobelitsina, and on drawing up at the post-station we observed standing in the yard an enormous vashok, or closed sledge, looking like a great funeral car placed upon runners. On entering the station we came upon the family who were travelling in this sledge. They consisted of a Russian military officer, his wife, and three little girls, the eldest of whom could not have numbered more than seven or eight years. They had evidently been sleeping all night in the station, and were now getting their breakfast. We ourselves felt hungry, but the station was small, and the officer, his family, and his baggage pretty well filled every corner. We accordingly ordered horses at once, and rattled away to the next station. As snow had fallen very sparsely on the sandy road, travelling was neither quick nor easy, and we were at a loss to know how the officer's huge, heavily laden omnibus could make its way over the ground at all. A two hours' drive brought us to the end of the stage, and, having ordered the starosta to bring us anything he had in the way of eatables, we were regaling ourselves on half-thawed milk and a large game-bird of some unknown species which proved excellent eating, when the great vashok came lumbering into the

yard, with five horses attached, and an extra yemshik riding as postillion on one of the two leaders. We were dismayed. It had never struck us till now that this family might be travelling in the same direction as ourselves. It was a serious matter. Only nine horses were kept at every station, and as this officer, who of course had a Crown podorozhnaya and could claim precedence of us, would always require five or six, a single posting-sledge meeting us from Blagovestchensk would leave us in the lurch, and we should experience anew the pleasures of which we had had a surfeit on the Khanka Lake.

Before we had finished breakfast the vashok, with five fresh horses attached, was away in the direction of Blagovestchensk. Fortunately for us there was still a team of horses not in use, and half an hour later we were galloping after, our yemshik spurred on to extra exertion by a promise of double drink-money. Handicapped as we were, having only a private against a Crown podorozhnaya, and no military uniform to awe yemshiks and station-masters into obedient alacrity in producing and harnessing horses, we entered with zest into one of the greatest pleasures of Siberian sledging—racing on the road. We knew that with a wife and a family of little children it was scarcely possible that our rival could travel night and day, and we determined if possible to catch him by nightfall and leave him before the morning fifty or sixty miles behind.

Fortunately for us we met not a single traveller during the whole day, or we must necessarily have been delayed at some village station for several hours. Never stopping to



eat or drink, we travelled on till by dusk just fifty miles had been covered since our late breakfast. Sometimes on nearing a post-station we would meet the officer's five horses returning homewards, under charge of two yemshiks; at other times we would come upon them taking their brief rest in the station-yard before returning, their shaggy coats glistening white with frozen perspiration. We never actually lost ground, but with all our efforts we found it impossible to materially reduce the half-hour's start which had been obtained while we were at breakfast.

It was about seven o'clock in the evening when we reached the end of the fifth stage and rattled into the station-yard at the smart gallop with which a yemshik always likes to finish his journey. Turning the corner sharply into the yard he brought the front of the sledge with a crash against the gate-post, and smashed in two a stout pole to which the near horse was harnessed. The first object which met our eyes in the yard was the vashok. Having surveyed the damage to our sledge and ascertained that it could be temporarily repaired with rope, we entered the station and found the Russian officer and his family encamped in the little guest-room for the night. We did not feel inclined to insist on our right to share the limited accommodation, even while taking our evening meal; and, defying hunger and cold, we settled ourselves down for another seventeen miles' drive in the cheerless night. It taught us a lesson which we were in no hurry to repeat. We learnt by painful experience that the only way to travel in Siberia with comfort in winter is to constantly replenish one's supply of

caloric with food and hot tea. We were now making a short cut across a bend of the river, and over the rough road the snow lay in so thin a layer that our progress was painfully slow. The thermometer stood more than twenty degrees below zero, and the cold penetrated through all our furs. It was the most wearisome and uncomfortable drive we had yet experienced, and the prospect of grave difficulties in store for us did not tend to cheer our spirits. We had been warned after leaving Khabarovka that on nearing Blagovestchensk we should probably experience serious difficulty in going forward in our sledge, owing to the absence of snow, and there seemed every prospect of this foreboding being realised.

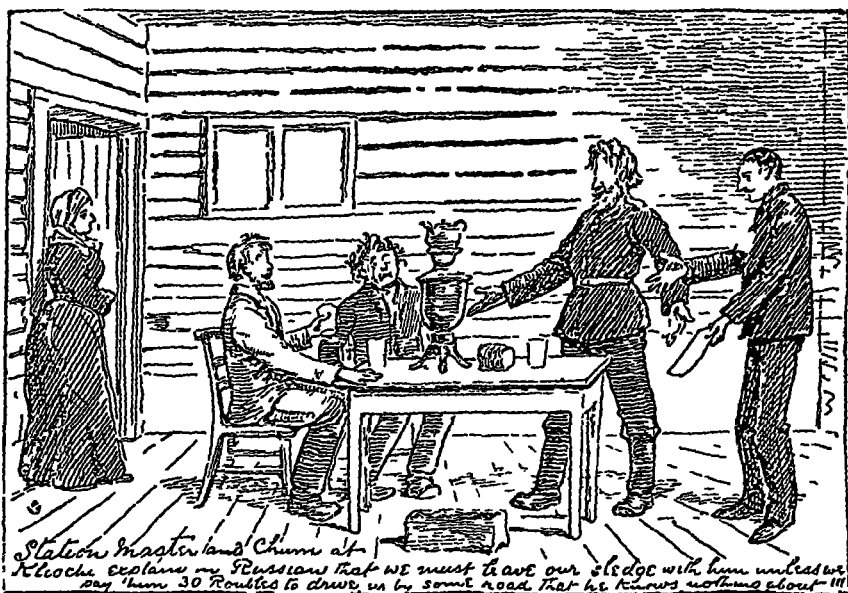
The evening was far advanced when we came to a halt at the next post-station. From our bag of frozen provisions we selected a chicken and a rabchik—a very palatable species of partridge found in Siberia—and gave them out with a loaf of bread to be thawed. The stove, however, was nearly cold, and a considerable time elapsed before the food was brought to us in a half-thawed condition—lukewarm without and solid ice within. But the feast was well seasoned with the sauce of hunger, and we had already made a considerable impression on the half-frozen meat when the station-master entered and requested to be made acquainted with our plans.

We mildly suggested that we should like three horses harnessed to the sledge at once, so that we might continue our journey as soon as we had finished our supper. The starosta immediately entered into a vigorous and voluble

declamation; but our knowledge of the Russian language was principally confined to a number of sentences suitable for travellers which we had mastered in Vladivostok, and the oration was utterly lost on us, except in so far as we understood that our suggestion did not meet with approval. Gradually we gathered that it was impossible that our sledge should proceed any farther. No snow had fallen, or at most it was spread so thin that the foot when lifted left a bare print upon the ground. What were we to do? The postmaster had a tarantas—a wheeled vehicle—in which we could proceed, and as for the sledge, we could leave that behind. He would buy it of us if we liked, he was willing to give three roubles for it.

But the sledge had cost us seventy roubles, and on the other side of Blagovestchensk—only some forty or fifty miles away—we should certainly require it again. No doubt the advice was highly disinterested, but we preferred to take our sledge with us. There was the Amur. Could we not go round by the river on the ice? That was possible, but the nearest point of the river was ten miles away, and the Amur made a great bend here, so that the distance would be much greater than by land. The regular post-road, too, cut across the bend, and there were no post-stations on the river at which we could change horses or get a meal. He was not bound by the Government regulations to take travellers that way, but he would undertake to land us in Blagovestchensk for thirty roubles. Subsequently he reduced the price to twenty roubles, but even then the prospect was not sufficiently tempting. The

tariff rate for three horses to Blagovestchensk would amount only to between five and six roubles, and most Russian travellers, though they obtained three horses, only paid for two. We insisted on proceeding by road. The starosta became excited, and invited a friend in to support him in his endeavour to convince us that it was impossible to proceed farther in our sledge

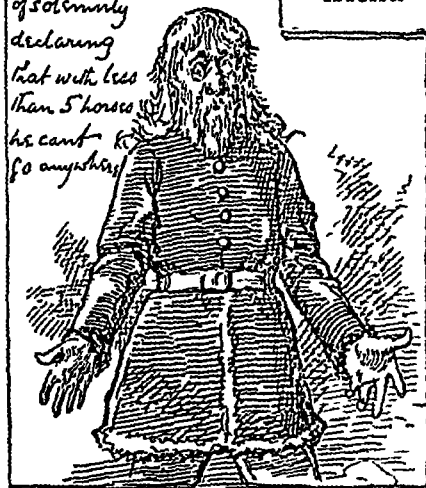


But we had laid to heart the lessons we had taken in the art of dealing with Russian station-masters. The more excited he became, the cooler we were. It was his business to transport us from his station to the next, and we declined to pay more than the tariff rate, or to leave our sledge behind. In our own minds we were very doubtful whether the Government regulations would compel him to transport

a heavy sledge over a snowless road; but diplomatically we kept this doubt to ourselves. We were in no hurry. We lighted our cigars and settled down to a comfortable smoke after dinner, we had found that in the extreme cold it is impossible to smoke with any degree of comfort out of doors. By-and-by we obtained an unexpected ally in the person of the starosta's wife. She was evidently interested in the fate of the unfortunate strangers in a foreign land,

and while her husband and his friend were debating in a corner

*Station master in the act  
of solemnly  
declaring  
that with less  
than 5 horses  
he can't  
go anywhere*



as to what modified terms they should offer, she approached us and whispered that all would come right and we should get our horses. Her whisper of hope was fulfilled. Eventually the station-master admitted that it might be possible to proceed by road with

extra horses, and he agreed to give us five on payment of the tariff rate for four.

In half an hour we were careering over the hard road with five horses all harnessed side by side in front of the sledge. The yemshik, wrapped up till he looked like a great round ball of deer and sheep skins, seemed elated at the prospect of driving such a team. With shrill screams and yells he vigorously plied the whip till the horses sped

along at a furious gallop, the poor old sledge creaking and groaning as it rattled and bumped over frozen cart-rucks boulders, and deep pits in the road. It was an exciting and exhilarating ride, but we were not sorry when it was over.

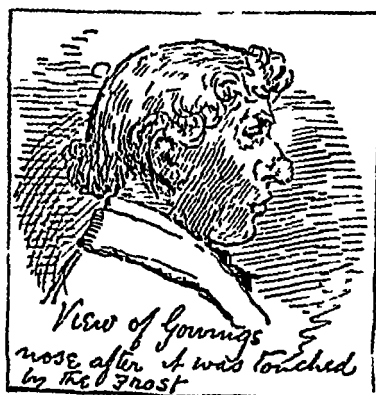
At the next station the old trouble was repeated, and as we were embarrassed in our negotiations by the assist-



ance of two Russian officers who were travelling in the opposite direction, we were unable to strike quite so good a bargain. However, we ultimately obtained four horses at tariff rate, and proceeded by road. The track was now entirely denuded of snow, and even with four horses it was with difficulty that we made any progress. The rickety sledge groaned and rattled more than ever. Our spirit

thermometer, though fastened carefully to the softest part of the felt lining of the hood, was shivered into fragments, and its contents were scattered in our faces, momentarily we ascertained the location of fresh bones in our bodies, and all thoughts of sleep were banished.

At length, when at daylight we arrived at the last station before Blagovestchensk, sleepless and sore of body, we had determined to yield to circumstances. We had proved that it was possible to sledge over a rough, snowless



road, but we had also satisfied ourselves that it was too violent a form of exercise to be indulged in with impunity. Transferring ourselves and our baggage to an open waggon, we rattled over the last eighteen miles of bleak plain, our sledge following empty behind us. A

keen wind blew straight into our unprotected faces, but, wearied by the rough restless night, I closed my eyes in sleep, and the frost seized this favourable opportunity to settle upon my nose. The result, though extremely unbecoming, was not painful. In a few days the slight frost-bite had disappeared, but it left the most exposed part of my face peculiarly susceptible to cold for the rest of the journey.

A very few miles of travelling in the rough, springless waggon was sufficient to convince us that whatever might

be the drawbacks of sledging, those of travelling by tarantas — especially in winter, when the roads are frozen hard — are infinitely greater, and it was with a deep sense of relief and satisfaction that after nearly three hours of intense discomfort we descended from the dreary, almost treeless plateau, and wound our way across the river Zea, one of the largest tributaries of the Amur. Along the opposite bank three or four small steamers lay frozen in—a signal of our ap-



proach to civilisation to which we accorded a glad welcome. On ascending this bank we found ourselves at once on the outskirts of the town, but we had still no little distance to go. One has to travel in Siberia in order to obtain an idea of the extraordinary number of acres that a town of three or four thousand inhabitants can be made to cover when spread out thin. At length, however, we drew up in the yard of Kosakovski's hotel, and had soon forgotten our troubles while eating a capital dinner in the most comfortable hotel-room we had seen since leaving Japan.

## CHAPTER VIII

## BLAGOVESTCHENSK

The City of Glad Tidings—A decent hotel—How Siberians wash—Among friends—The pleasures of hospitality—A curious sledge—Foreign testimony as to life in Siberia—A comfortable home—Foreign merchants and German officials—A new postal administration—A frozen market—Effects of the cold—A royal gift—A new podorozhnaya—Pairs and troikas—Molokans—Off up the Amur

BLAGOVESTCHENSK, the 'City of Glad Tidings,' is by far the finest and the most pleasant city in Siberia eastward of the Baikal Sea. Its northern side is washed by the Zea, and its southern by the Amur, and if its present career of growing prosperity continues unchecked, no doubt it will before long extend eastward to the extreme point of the narrow neck of land which divides the great river from its tributary. Its fine broad streets, as we passed through them in our tarantas, could not be said to present a busy appearance, but a number of sledges of curious shape were plying for hire, and among the pedestrians on business intent were a number of Manchurians from Sakhalin Ula-Hotun, or the 'City of the Black River,' on the opposite shore of the Amur. The houses were still all of wood, but they were more ornate, and generally presented a more prosperous appearance than those of Khabarovka, while

the domes of at least three churches, one of which had some pretension to architectural beauty, were to be discerned in different parts of the town

Our quarters at the hotel we found comfortable beyond anticipation. The bedroom which we shared was, it is true, neither lofty nor spacious, but it was provided with two folding bedsteads of civilised manufacture, on which we could hope to obtain the unaccustomed luxury of a good night's rest. There was no bath-room, it is true; nor was the bedroom provided with anything in the way of a washstand and accessories, but in the corner of a passage outside was a patent washing-machine of a kind very commonly adopted throughout Russia and Siberia, the use of which we could share with the rest of the visitors at the hotel. The Siberian never makes use of a basin or tub to wash hands or face, or if he does he never uses it as a civilised being would. He likes to wash under a thin stream of trickling water, and if he has only the ordinary resources of civilisation at his command he gets a servant to slowly pour a few drops of water out of the jug while he washes under the thin stream. He would probably think it uncleanly to bring hands or face in contact with the soiled water caught by the basin, though his notions on the subject of cleanliness are by no means strict. His favourite contrivance is, however, a brass receptacle hung on the wall, and coming to a point or nozzle at the bottom. Through this nozzle the water can be made to trickle, and under it the Russian performs his ablutions as well as the circumstances will permit. Below, to catch the drippings,

a large brass pan is placed, and as this pan is sometimes also used as a spittoon and a receptacle for cigarette-ends, scraps of rejected food, and other refuse, washing in Siberia is not an unalloyed luxury. I do not mean to say that this description applies to private houses of the better class, but it is a plain, unexaggerated description of the state of things ablutionary in more than one hotel of some pretensions which we visited during our journey. Baths are never found in Siberian houses, but in every town of any importance a public Russian vapour-bath has been established, and this is generally well patronised.

Having rendered ourselves as presentable as the circumstances permitted, and having refreshed ourselves with a good hot dinner, we inquired our way to the telegraph office, where we had hopes of meeting friends. To one gentleman, Mr Nielsen, we had between us three letters of introduction, while to the wife of another, Mr. Paulsen, we were bringing from a lady in Vladivostok a present consisting of a little box of frozen oranges—a luxury somewhat difficult to procure in the interior of Siberia. When sent by parcel-post, fruit is liable to undergo a course of alternate freezing in sledges and thawing in post-stations which is destructive of its best qualities. Frozen fruit has to be thawed very gently, or it is spoilt. The usual plan is to place it in water only removed a few degrees from the freezing point, and to let it very gradually assimilate its temperature to that of the water. We had taken good care that our oranges should not thaw. They had been rattling about in their box like little cannon-balls, and we hoped

they would form a pleasant letter of introduction. We were not disappointed. If only a hundredth part of the kindness we received from their recipients is due to those oranges, we owe them a debt of gratitude which should never be forgotten.

Our way to the telegraph station led along a fine broad street overlooking the Amur River—'The Bund,' as it would have been termed had Blagovestchensk been an Anglo-Eastern city. Farther on, a public garden overshadowed by fine trees interposed itself between the road and the river, and it was easy to imagine how pleasant a spot this would be in the warm summer days. On the ice of the river a smooth space had been swept clean for skating, and at a little distance a capital katchuska, or toboggan, had been erected, but just then both rink and toboggan were deserted.

At the telegraph station we at once found ourselves among friends, and in half an hour we were driving through the streets of Blagovestchensk on a public conveyance of most extraordinary shape. The body of the vehicle was formed like the back of a broad horse, at right angles to it behind was a seat large enough for about one person and a half; but as the back of the dummy horse was on the same level as the seat and joined up to it, it was very difficult for anyone behind to find a place for his legs. However, our party of three managed to find accommodation, one sitting astride the wooden horse-back, and the others behind, with their legs dangling on either side, in imminent danger of falling off every time the springless vehicle

bumped over a stone or turned a corner. Who on earth exercised his ingenuity in the invention of a vehicle so utterly comfortless and inconvenient, and how he managed to obtain its adoption into general use in the streets of the town, are mysteries which we were unable to solve.

Our guide and companion, Mr. Nielsen, was enthusiastic in his praises of the town which for ten years had been his home. Even the pride of race which is so deep-seated in the heart of every Dane seemed to be undermined by his admiration for his new home, and he was rather proud than otherwise to be called a Russian. Englishmen who have been in the habit of regarding Siberia as a land of horrors, unfit for human existence, peopled only by exiles and their gaolers, may be a little incredulous when told that a gentleman accustomed to the civilisation of Western Europe could prefer such a land to his own country. But this was no isolated case. We came across even Englishmen who, after a long residence in Siberia, found home life less pleasing to them, and longed to return to the land of their adoption.

Travellers in distant lands, in newly opened countries, or among semi-barbarous nations, where 'white men' are few and far between, have at least this advantage over home-keeping folk that when by chance they do alight on a settlement of their fellow-countrymen they taste of the pleasures of boundless hospitality with a keen relish which can scarcely be imagined by those who spend all their lives surrounded by civilisation. In Blagovestchensk, it is true, we found not a single Englishman or Englishwoman, but

nevertheless we were in the midst of English-speaking people, who could not have treated us more kindly or made us more thoroughly at home had we been not only of their own nationality but of their very families. Barely a quarter of our long sledge journey was yet accomplished, but we could not resist the attractions by which we were surrounded, and although a forty-eight hours' rest was all we had allowed ourselves, the evening of the fifth day was drawing to a close before we were once more under way. At the house of Mr. Paulsen, a Danish gentleman who, in addition to fulfilling his duties as an officer of the Imperial Russian Telegraph Service, has established a very successful brewery in the town, we learnt in how high a degree of comfort it is possible to exist in the midst of the wild regions of Eastern Siberia. Externally Mr. Paulsen's residence was an ordinary Siberian wooden house, but when one stepped within, one could imagine himself suddenly transported into a London suburban villa. A spacious conservatory opening from the drawing-room was filled with flourishing plants, some of them natives of countries thousands of miles away, and everything betokened so high a degree of comfort that it was almost impossible to realise that one was in the midst of Siberia. From Mrs. Paulsen, a German lady, as well as from her husband, we received the heartiest of welcomes, and when we were subsequently told, some hundreds of miles from Blagovestchensk, that this lady kept the best table in the Amur Province, not excepting that of his Excellency the Governor-General, we felt not the smallest inclination to doubt the truthfulness of our informant.

On the day after our arrival we made the acquaintance of Messrs Poppe and Kehel, partners in the German firm of Dieckmann and Co, merchants and shipowners, who are doing a vast business in the importation of German manufactures and produce into Siberia by way of the Amur, and for the remainder of our stay their house was thrown open to us. We heard everywhere that the Russians are on the whole not too well disposed towards their German fellow-residents, and the fact is not very difficult to understand. In all the larger towns of Eastern Siberia, German names, somewhat disguised by the Russian characters in which they are expressed, may be read over the doors of the principal shops, and it is not altogether to be wondered at that the success which attends the superior energy and mercantile ability of their Teutonic neighbours settled amongst them should give rise to a certain feeling of jealousy in Russian breasts. After leaving Vladivostok we never came across a single English house of business until we arrived at the end of our sledge journey in Asia, though in the great towns of the Amur—at Khabarovka, at Blagovestchensk, and at Stretensk, we frequently came across the stores and branch offices of Mr Enoch Emery, an enterprising American merchant whose headquarters are at the seaport of Nikolaevsk, and whom by a fortunate accident we subsequently met at Moscow.

In addition to the German merchants there are some few officials also of German birth, though in most cases they have become naturalised as Russian subjects. The superintendent of telegraphs in Blagovestchensk, Mr Adamson,



was a native of Dresden who also had under his control the letter administration and Government post-travelling arrangements in his district. For at the time of our journey a scheme for the amalgamation of these three branches of the service was just coming into operation. In some districts, as for instance in Blagovestchensk and its neighbourhood, the new system was already in working order, but elsewhere we found the three departments under quite separate administrations. Probably when the new system has been thoroughly established, some advantages will be derived from it, and travellers will find that station-masters and yemshiks are under more efficient control than they were of old, but, as far as our experience went, we found that at those stations where we were at the mercy of a pretentious official in the smart uniform of a postal officer, we had longer to wait and more difficulty in purchasing food, or getting our own frozen viands cooked, than when the only occupant of the post-station proved to be an illiterate, unkempt, unwashed peasant.

The open market-place of Blagovestchensk presented a very remarkable appearance at this winter season. Game, meat, fish, milk, and provisions of various kinds were being offered for sale in profusion when we passed through it on the second day of our stay in the town. At first the stock of meat seemed larger than could possibly be needed by a town of some 8,000 inhabitants, but when we remembered that the butcher was under no immediate necessity of disposing of his ware for fear of its spoiling, and that even the fish had probably been dead for several weeks,

we were no longer surprised. The fish rested on their frozen noses, stacked up in threes or fours, like the tripod for a gipsy kettle, or the piled rifles of a regiment, and we did not at first recognise that the solid white lumps, shaped like bowls of various sizes and piled up into pyramids, consisted of frozen milk. The butchers had hard work to chop in pieces the stony carcasses of bullocks, and even the loaves of bread would have served very well for driving nails into a deal board.

For the cold had now greatly increased in severity. In the early morning a thermometer hung outside the window of our hotel registered as low as  $-27^{\circ}$  Reaumur, or more than  $28^{\circ}$  below zero Fahrenheit. Although the



hotel was, like all houses in Siberia, furnished throughout with double windows, and although our room was heated almost to an uncomfortable degree of warmth, the cold outside was so great that even on the inner surface of the inner windows the moisture of the ill-ventilated apartment formed a collection of ice in some places more than an inch in thickness.

In spite, however, of wind and cold, the clear night air had a wonderfully bracing effect. The fatigues of our journey

were soon dissipated, and even the sudden change from the coarse, plain fare of the road to the best of good living was powerless to affect us

On the fifth day after our arrival in the town we reluctantly determined to tear ourselves away. It wanted but two days to the Russian Christmas, but we refused to be tempted by the pressing invitations which we received to remain and study the Siberian method of celebrating the festival. Our preparations were all made. Mrs. Paulsen had most kindly volunteered to undertake the functions of our commissariat, and we had received from her hands a royal gift in the shape of a huge sack crammed with frozen viands. First and foremost it contained a variety of excellent soups, set out to freeze in soup plates, so that one had but to dip into the bag, draw forth two discs of brown ice, and deliver them over to the rule of the post-station kitchen, and in a few minutes a bowl of steaming hot soup would be set before us, very different in flavour from the native 'shitchee'. Among the remainder of the provisions were an enormous joint of roast beef, a fine goose, and a leg of lamb, while from a German sausage-maker who had established himself in the town, we had procured a supply of *Wurst* in great variety, and in quantity almost sufficient to stock a German larder for a month. Our broken spirit thermometer we replaced by one of quicksilver, the only kind easily procurable, and the damage sustained by our sledge had been roughly repaired.

Our *podorozhnaya*, or permit to travel, had expired. The rules of the Government with regard to the grant-

ing of podorozhnayas are rather complicated, and the officials themselves do not seem to be thoroughly posted in them. It is usual for two men travelling together to obtain a permit for two horses, and only to pay for two horses at each station, though in Eastern Siberia they always obtain three. If, however, the travellers' luggage is over a certain weight, the station-master can demand payment for three horses, and as the stations are never provided with weighing machines the weight of luggage is a constant source of dispute between travellers and station-masters. At the time we left Vladivostok, the winter road was not yet formally open. The date fixed by regulation for this event was, we were told, the 15th of the Russian December, and if we started before that date it would be necessary for us to take a permit for three horses instead of two. This meant a serious increase in the cost of the journey, as with three horses mentioned in the podorozhnaya the station-master could always demand payment for three, and the cost of travel was thus increased fifty per cent. There was, however, nothing for it but to submit, and we had accordingly taken out a permit for Blagovestchensk, hoping there to obtain one for two horses for the rest of the journey. To our disgust we found, when travelling from Vladivostok to Khabarovka, that Russians who had obtained permits on the same date as ourselves, and under precisely similar circumstances, had been granted two-horse permits, and were travelling at two-thirds our cost. However, at Blagovestchensk we found no difficulty in obtaining a two-horse permit thence to Tiumen, and we congratulated our-

selves that even if we were still compelled to pay for three horses we had saved a substantial sum in the Government tax, which is calculated at the rate of one kopek per verst, for each horse mentioned in the *podorozhnaya*

Aimed with our new permit we proceeded on the morning of Tuesday, January 4, to the post-station, lying on the outskirts of the town, and entered into negotiations with the *starosta* for continuing our journey. The first stage, he told us, was overland, and, as snow was still lacking, sledging would be impracticable. It was possible to go round by river, but the distance was much greater—twenty-eight miles instead of sixteen, and as the river-route was rough and bad, and the Government regulations did not require him to take us by river, he would have to ask a higher rate of payment. We agreed to pay at the tariff rate for three horses by the long river-route, and it was promised that the *yemshik* and *troika* should be at the hotel by eight o'clock in the evening.

In order to smooth the negotiations I had at an early stage offered the *starosta* a cigarette, but he refused the offer with emphasis, and Mr. Nielsen informed me that the man was a Molokan, and consequently never smoked. The Molokans, or Milkmen, who have obtained their name from their custom of drinking milk on fast-days, are a remarkable body of dissenters from the Greek Church. They are opposed to the worship of the sacred pictures or *ikons* which form an indispensable part of the furniture of every room in an orthodox Russian's house, they profess to obtain their doctrines directly from the Bible as the only

inspired source of religious knowledge, and generally they approach very nearly to some sects of English Protestants. They have suffered much persecution at the hands of the Orthodox Church, and are said to have come out of it unscathed, being generally reported to form the most honest, industrious, and sober class to be found in the Russian Empire. We did not find, however, that the religious tenets of our friend the station-master of Blagovestchensk prevented him from imposing somewhat on the helpless traveller. The route by which we reached the first station was an excellent sledging road, and the distance proved to be nothing like twenty-seven miles.

Punctually at the promised hour the horses appeared in the hotel yard. Our goods were hastily packed into the sledge, and, farewells being said, we galloped off up the river. For the first time since starting we had donned all our furs, drawing our heavy sheepskin coats over the double deer-skin kukliankas. We were like huge bundles of skins, the sledge seemed scarcely big enough to hold us, and to move an arm or a leg was almost impossible. Gradually, however, we became accustomed to the strange costume, and as the thermometer daily fell lower and lower till the mercury was frozen solid and refused to tell us how cold it was, we felt that we were none too warmly clothed.

## CHAPTER IX

## BLAGOVESICHENSK TO ALBAZIN

The beauties of the Amur—The Siberian moon—Collisions—Buriat Cossacks—Missionary work among the Buriats—Slow travelling—'Pochta budet'—Effects of the cold—Sleepy yemshuks—A natty post station—Pairs and troikas—Burning cold—Camels and oxen—The cowardly wolf—Private houses—Russian bargains—The Buriats again—Drunken yemshuks—The duga—Cossacks on the spree—A lonely post station—Deer and deerskins—A meeting with old friends—The Siberian carpenter—A dangerous drive—Albazin

WE were now entering upon the grandest, the most picturesque region through which we were to pass during the whole of our journey from the Pacific to the borders of the Baltic Sea. Summer travellers exhaust their vocabulary of superlatives in their descriptions of the beauties of the Amur between Albazin and Blagovestchensk. The numerous islets fringed with snow-white sand and brilliant with foliage and blossom look, they tell us, like floating flower beds on the clear surface of the water over which the little steamers glide, while along the banks thickly wooded hills and rocky cliffs alternate with grassy plains. All these visions of loveliness were, of course, denied to us, but there was a stern grandeur in the wintry landscape which, in its unfamiliarity, more than compensated us for

the loss of the milder beauties of summer At places the rugged cliffs rose to great heights sheer upright from the frozen river, and elsewhere the course lay between undulating hills, whose snowy mantle was completely hidden by the thickly clustered trunks and branches of gaunt, leafless trees or woods of pines and firs, amidst the dark foliage of which gleamed here and there the white bark of the slender silver birches

But it was night when we left the provincial capital, and the moon, born on the Western Christmas Day, yet wanted three days of attaining its prime For my diary, in three calendars, showed that while in the sledge, where we kept English time, we were still in the fourth day of January, on the left bank of the river the dawn of Christmas Eve was at hand, and on the night they would soon register the twelfth day of the twelfth moon of the twelfth year of his Imperial Majesty Kuang Hsu, ruler of the Celestial Empire A Chinese month is truly lunar, and by reference to a Chinese calendar one can always tell in a moment, barring clouds and mists, how much moonlight he may expect on any night of the year And the moon becomes an object of more than ordinary interest on a journey such as we were making, for though, as I have said, the nights were never really dark, it may be easily imagined that sledging in the moonlight nights had a charm which the brightest starlight could never give When, in the long vigils between dusk and sunrise, sleep deserted us, there was occupation in watching the moon from night to night as it increased in strength till it reached its plenitude



and began to wane, and for my part I have seemed on closer terms of intimacy with Astarte since that journey than I ever felt myself before

In the middle of the night, as we were proceeding up the river, a line of some three or four sledges laden with men and merchandise came winding along in the opposite direction, and we suddenly experienced a heavy crash as our sledge was brought violently into collision with one of the train. Our yemshik treated the matter coolly enough. He had almost the whole broad river on which to pick his path, but collisions are regarded as pleasant little incidents to relieve the monotony of sledge-travelling, and the outriggers will, as a rule—though not always—prevent either vehicle from overturning. We were not, however, surprised to find that the iron band of a sledge-runner, worn thin over the stony roads beyond Blagovestchensk, had broken in two. It was impossible to proceed in this condition; and when at three in the morning we arrived at Ekaterinovska—one of numerous villages named after Catherine the Great—we determined to put up for the remainder of the night and seek a blacksmith at daylight.

We had just finished a frugal supper of tea and biscuits, and were composing ourselves for sleep with fragrant Manilas brought with us from China, when we were disturbed by the arrival of two open sledges, and presently five Cossack soldiers walked into the guest-room. One was evidently Russian, but the dusky faces, narrow eyes, and broad noses of the other four told of Mongolian blood.

in their veins. They were very sociable. After drinking several glasses of tea they produced a large bottle of 'schnapps' and invited us to drink with them. We were a little doubtful as to what species of alcoholic poison the bottle contained, but both Uien and myself had had sufficient experience of Eastern races to know that if one desires to cultivate pleasant relations with them, one must not be too fastidious, but must be content to do in Rome as the Romans do. We had learnt, too, that one cannot offend a Russian more than by rejecting an offer of hospitality, and we accordingly accepted the proffered drink. It proved to be a liquor very similar to 'square-face' gin, and decidedly more to our taste than vodka.

We learnt that our fellow-travellers were a party of Cossack soldiers returning home on leave after several years' service on the banks of the Amur and Ussuri. 'Are you Russian?' my companion asked of one of the dusky-skinned soldiers. 'No,' he replied, 'we are Burials.' The reply struck me as a little odd, for I have several times in her Majesty's Supreme Court for China and Japan heard individuals with high cheek-bones and deep bronze complexions declare, in answer to questions as to their nationality, that they were Englishmen. This Burial soldier was undoubtedly, like the majority of his tribe, a Russian subject, but his feeling of loyalty was not strong enough to induce him to identify himself with the dominant race.

The party was travelling in the same direction as ourselves, and we were destined to see a good deal of them

during the next few days. Two of them were to leave the post-road at Albazin and thence to proceed far inland where there were no houses and no roads, and where for days together they might not come across a living soul. Inured as they were to hardships, it was evident that they did not look forward to this portion of their journey with any degree of pleasure. Of the remaining three we gathered that one had his home in the neighbourhood of Kiakhta, while the other two had also to proceed a considerable distance along our own route.

The Buriats are a Mongolian race, principally occupying a vast steppe in the Trans-Baikal Province, through which we were subsequently to pass. They were the first Siberian native race amongst whom Christian propagandist work was instituted, two English ministers, Messrs. Stallybass and Swan, having gone out amongst them some seventy years ago. The mission lasted about twenty-four years before it was broken up by the Tsar Nicholas, at the instigation of the Greek Church ecclesiastical authorities, but, although this mission was doubtless valuable as a civilising agency, it would appear from all accounts to have made very few converts from Buddhism and Shamanism, the ancient religions of the race. Latterly, however, close contact and intermarriage with the Russians have been the means of bringing thousands of Buriats into the Greek Church fold, and I noticed that two or three of our Cossack friends crossed themselves reverently before the ikons at the post-stations. Another of them, however, who had risen to the grade of a petty officer in his Cossack

corps, informed me that he was a lama, or celibate priest of Buddhism

Dwellers among the Buriats describe them as being one of the most intelligent of the native races of Siberia, and, judging from our experience of these Cossacks during some days of travel in their company, I should say the reputation is deserved. Nor were they altogether uneducated. Some, if not all of them, could read and write the Russian language, and at least one understood the Roman alphabet. As far as we could judge, too, their knowledge of Western countries, though extremely limited, was in advance of that of many of the Russian peasants with whom we came in contact. They displayed the greatest interest in our expedition, followed out our route on the map, examined our clothes and our belongings, and asked us many questions, some of which our limited vocabulary of Russian words did not enable us to answer. They showed us photographs of themselves and Buriat friends taken in Siberian towns, and they often put themselves to much inconvenience in order to render us little kindly services.

In about an hour our first interview came to an end, and my companion and I stretched ourselves out on the floor for a couple of hours' sleep before morning. Soon after daylight the station-master introduced us to a blacksmith. No new iron band was procurable, but the broken band was soon ripped off, and, after the thick, unworn ends had been welded together, replaced on the runner. Half an hour before noon we were once more under way, and a pleasant two hours' sledging over smooth ice amidst

picturesque scenery brought us to the little village of Bibikova

We had been warned before leaving Blagovestchensk that we should find travelling on the Upper Amur and Shilka rivers slow and difficult, owing to the scarcity of horses and the comparative abundance of voyagers. Between Khabarovka and the Amur capital we had recorded an average of nearly two hundred versts a day, but between here and Stretensk we should be lucky, we were told, if we managed to cover half this distance. Along the whole of this part of the route only three troikas are kept at a station, and as two of these are required almost daily for the conveyance of the mails, the supply of horses at the disposal of travellers is very limited. The district, too, is very sparsely populated, and it is often difficult to obtain private horses even on payment of double fares. At Bibikova the old story of 'no horses,' which we had only once heard since leaving the Khanka Lake, was told once more, and during the next few days it was repeated to the verge of damnable iteration. Six hours was the length of our enforced halt, but Mrs Paulsen's bag of frozen viands provided us with a bounteous feast, and a subsequent nap on the floor compensated us for some of the sleep lost on the previous night.

At eight in the evening fresh horses were harnessed; and towards midnight we pulled up at the foot of a steep cliff. We could see no house, but the yemshik pointed to a steep roadway winding up the bank, and, after clambering for some distance encumbered by our heavy furs, we

perceived the station. We were told we could proceed no farther. There were horses at the station, but '*Pochta budet*'—a mail was expected, and the horses must be kept for it. We expostulated, but without effect. Then we insisted that the horses, which had been taken out of the sledge and brought up the hill, should be reharnessed, and the vehicle brought up into safety, for we had met more than one Mongolian caravan winding along the ice during the day, and we did not quite relish the idea of leaving our worldly possessions on the river, out of sight and hearing of the station, at the mercy of emigrants and travellers, civilised and savage. The station-master protested that there was no ground for uneasiness, but when we solemnly assured him that we should hold him responsible for every kopek of the value of our sledge and its contents, as we knew we had a legal right to do, he began to reconsider his decision. Other men were called in, a consultation was held, and a decision was apparently come to that we were troublesome customers, and had better be got rid of as soon as possible, for in half an hour fresh horses were in the sledge and we were once more on our way, enjoying the pleasures of midnight sledging.

The cold had now reached almost its greatest intensity, but it was impossible with our mercury thermometer to ascertain exactly what number of degrees we were experiencing. At night the quicksilver, which freezes at about 39 degrees below zero Fahrenheit, became solidified, though it rose by midday as high as 30 and 25 degrees. The air, however, was perfectly still, and in the bright,

sunshiny days the cold caused us comparatively little discomfort, though my companion had at every station to pick from his moustache lumps of ice as large as walnuts, formed by the congealed moisture of his breath. At night, while sleeping in the sledge, was the most uncomfortable time, for then we had to choose between covering our faces with thick scarves or the lappets of our caps, or leaving them exposed to the air. In the first case we always, on waking, found our faces soaked with breath-engendered moisture, which tickled down our necks and made us miserably damp, while exposure of the nose caused serious danger of frost-bite. If the mouth and nose were alone covered, and the eyes were left exposed, the breath, driven upwards by the scarf, settled on our eyelashes and froze there, with the result that on waking we found our eyelids glued together with ice, which we had to thaw with our fingers before we could look about us.

If it were not for the necessity of breathing, travelling in frigid climates would be far more pleasant than it is. For although the discomfort caused by the freezing of the breath is greatest at night, even by day it is not inconsiderable. One's coat collar becomes stiff with ice; and every thread of fur within reach of one's breath is white with hoar-frost. As soon as one enters a warm room all this frozen moisture begins to thaw, and soon all one's wraps in the region of the throat are in the sloppiest condition. To dry them at the fire is not a long process, but when it has to be repeated at station after station half a dozen times a day the task becomes monotonous. But it

only those adorned with long beards and moustaches who can enjoy all these luxuries in their supreme degree. For when beard, moustache, scarf, and fur coat are frozen together into one inseparable mass, their owner has to sit stewing in all his furs in a hot room till the ice has thawed, or else to effect a release at the risk of tearing locks of hair from his chin and upper lip.

Another pleasure of night travelling which we experienced several times in this part of our journey is that of waking up after three or four hours' travelling on a fifteen-mile stage to find the yemshuk asleep on the box, and the horses, half asleep also, creeping along at the rate of a mile an hour. Then is the time to bring into requisition one's readily acquired stock of Russian oaths. On perchance one arrives at the end of the stage before waking, to find that a journey which ought to have been completed in an hour and a half has taken four hours to accomplish. The only course then open to one is to deprive the yemshuk of his drink-money—'na chai,' 'for tea' as they call it in the West, while in the East then less decorous but more truthful brethren term it 'na vodka.'

It was after a stage of this kind that we arrived in the early Russian Christmas morning at the post-station of Koisakova and were ushered into the neatest and best-furnished little guest-room which we had yet seen. In honour of the day, presumably, a little oil lamp was burning before the sacred picture in the corner, the walls were hung with photographs and pictures, the floor was carpeted, and little nick-nacks and antimacassars orna-



mented the furniture. The little room bore every sign of being used as the family parlour during the absence of travellers, and we felt quite at home as we made our usual early morning meal of tea and biscuits while fresh horses were being harnessed. Presently we had our customary dispute with the station-master over the post-fare, and, having lost the battle, paid for three horses and remounted our sledge.

For we had resolved to stand upon our rights. Russians travelling with three horses usually only paid for two, and why should we pay for more? It is true the difference was only three kopeks per verst, or a little more than a farthing for each of us in Eastern Siberia, and less than a farthing in the West, but at Blagovestchensk we had still considerably over five thousand versts to cover before reaching the railway at Tiumen, not to mention the sledging in Europe, and if we could succeed in getting all the way through for a two-horse fare we should be the gainers by some thirteen or fourteen pounds. Moreover my companion, who was of a somewhat pugnacious temperament, took delight in these little battles. In the great majority of cases the station-master would accept payment for two horses without a murmur, but whenever we saw a little procession of yemshiks file out of the house into the station-yard or into the roadway in front and laboriously heave one side of the sledge off the ground, we always knew there was trouble in store. The station-master would return to us with a long face and a sad story about the dreadful weight of our baggage. It was wonderful how their estimates

varied. Some declared that we had ten *pud* of forty pounds, and some twenty-five but they were pretty well all agreed—those who lifted the sledge—that there was more weight than the regulations allowed us to take with a pair of horses.

Sometimes we gained the victory in these little disputes, but candour compels me to admit that these cases were the exceptions. For the battle generally resolved itself into a trial of patience, and as the starosta had the whole day before him and we were anxious to proceed without delays, we usually gave way after a few minutes' wrangling and paid the three-horse fare demanded. We had indeed been advised at Vladivostok to save ourselves trouble and annoyance by making up our minds beforehand to pay for three horses throughout, but we had the satisfaction of knowing at the end of our journey that we had saved some few pounds by rejecting this advice.

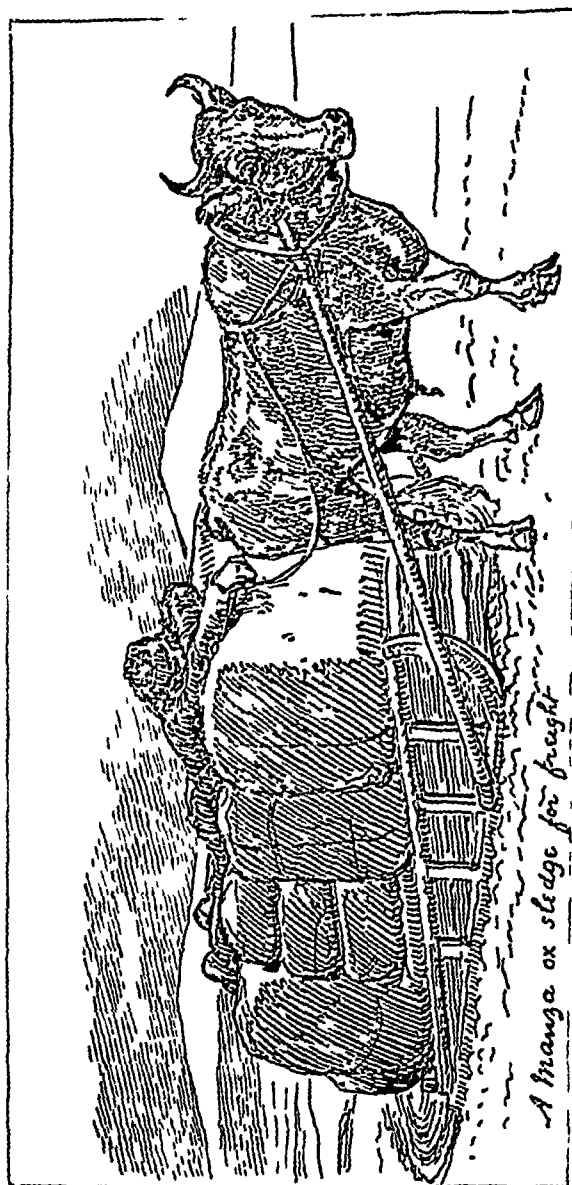
At nine o'clock on the Russian Christmas morning we halted at the village of Kumarsk, and searched the sledge for a tin of prime Wiltshire bacon which we knew was to be found somewhere among the packages. Fingerless fur gloves are not the most convenient articles for handiwork, and while searching for the tin I laid my gloves aside, for, although a prolonged exposure of the fingers would infallibly result in frost-bite, it takes some little time for even the severest cold to penetrate, and for five or ten minutes one can work in the open air with ungloved hands and suffer little inconvenience. But I had forgotten the stories in my school lesson-books of cold metals burning the flesh as if

red-hot, and seizing the bacon tin I attempted to carry it into the house. But I soon dropped it. It did not actually blister my flesh, but the sensation was certainly very similar to burning. The thermometer at this time could not, as we afterwards learnt, have registered much less than 80 degrees of frost, which is pretty respectable even for an Arctic winter, so I arrived at the conclusion that those school-book stories were just a little exaggerated.

It is said that Siberians often, after taking a vapour-bath in the very depth of winter, rush out steaming and stark naked from the bath-house and take a quick roll in the snow. I never saw this done, and for my own part it is a feat I should not care to attempt, but from some little experiments I made myself I am convinced that there is nothing impossible in it, and that even the discomfort would not be so great as some might imagine.

The fact is, as candid travellers admit, that the effects of this extreme cold, though often very curious and always inconvenient, are not so terrible in themselves as might be supposed. Of course when combined with lack of warm clothing or scarcity of food, and with great fatigue, its effects are terrible indeed, and the sufferings which have been endured by Arctic explorers are doubtless impossible of exaggeration. But the healthy traveller who has nothing but the cold to contend with, and who is well supplied with appliances for setting it at defiance, will suffer from nothing worse than petty inconveniences and discomforts. I have heard one Siberian traveller declare that he had felt the cold more during an easterly wind in the sub-tropical parts of

Occasionally we met or passed a caravan of sledges drawn



*A Munga ox sledge for freight*

by long-horned cattle or horses; and once a long train of sledges passed us drawn by camels; while from little, low, tent-like erections, built up on the sledges and open to the back, dusky faces of Mongolian type peered up at us. Once an exclamation from our yemshik put us on the alert, and, looking in the direction to which he pointed his whip, we saw a large wolf standing in the middle of the

sledge-track a hundred yards or so ahead of us. He re-

gaired us with apparent interest as we approached, but before we had got within fifty yards of him he scampered away, and was soon up the bank and out of sight.

Later on, while travelling along the river Uda, I saw another wolf, but these were the only two of the dreaded animals we encountered, though a Russian who travelled from Khabarovka a few miles behind us told us he saw altogether eight between that town and Tomsk. There appears to be a notion among Englishmen—and indeed among Western Europeans generally—that wolves are a serious source of danger to travellers in Siberia. There is an idea, derived from some old Russian tale, that it is necessary for the traveller to take a stock of babies with him so that he can throw out one now and again to engage the attention of the wolves while he makes his escape. Recent voyagers have done something to dissipate these errors, but they are still pretty widely current. As a matter of fact the Siberian wolf is a cowardly animal. He does sometimes give trouble to lonely pedestrians, but such a thing as an attack by wolves upon a post-sledge is utterly unknown in Siberia.

Occasionally the blue smoke of wood-fires curling up from the right bank of the river showed us the position of Mongol villages, but they were very few and far between. At the stations we sometimes met two or three Russians travelling between village and village, but often for a whole night the only human being we could see would be a returning yemshik lying asleep at the bottom of a little low sledge amidst his furs, while one horse drew him homewards.

at a walking pace, and two others followed behind at their own sweet wills. For a team of returning horses is not required to bring home passengers. At each station a certain number of animals are kept, they take travellers to the nearest station in either direction, but they go back empty-handed—if such a phrase can be applied to horses—even though there may be a dozen passengers waiting to go to the station to which they are returning. This is the rule, but it is not always strictly carried out. As we were glad to discover on one occasion, it is sometimes possible to bribe a returning yemshik to give his horses double duty.

Towards midnight on the Russian Christmas Day we arrived at a village called Tsagayan, and found two sledges laden with heavy mail-bags standing in the station-yard. It was the second post we had met that day, and, as we expected, it left no horses for us. Perhaps there were none for the mails either, at all events they did not proceed till the following morning, the postman—a youth in his teens—hanging his long revolver over his head, and peacefully sharing with us such sleeping accommodation as the station-house afforded, while his letters remained out in the yard in their leather bags.

Delays were beginning to get monotonous, and when, on the following day at Kuznetsova, we were again told that there were no post-horses to be had for some hours, we sent out into the village to see what could be obtained from the peasants. The Christmas festivities seemed not yet to be at an end, for while we were awaiting our messenger's return, a troop of young guls, in the national peasant dress,

came marching in procession to the station, and presently we heard them giggling and romping in the next room, divided from ours only by a wooden partition full of chunks and knot-holes, at which we could frequently discern a glistering eye. Presently our messenger returned, and a bargain was soon struck for our conveyance to the next station for three roubles, a little more than double the two-horse posting fare.

We were surprised to find only two horses harnessed to the sledge. Hitherto we had travelled once with five horses and once with four, but never with less than three. However, we were assured that the pair could take us comfortably, and certainly the work seemed easy enough for them along the smooth ice of the river. They galloped away, making considerably better time than we had often made with a troika. At the end of the stage, however, we received a lesson in Russian bargaining. Although the bargain had unmistakably been for three roubles, the yemshik stoutly denied this, and demanded four roubles and a half. And this was not the only occasion on which we experienced a difficulty of this sort. Two or three times we made a bargain, through a station-master, for a supply of private horses, and afterwards had the bargain repudiated and higher terms demanded by the owner of the beasts, who, seeing we were foreigners, thought he saw a chance of bleeding us.

This 'going back on' a bargain once made was new to us, and proved very exasperating. The recognised principle of trade among nearly all Eastern races is for the seller to

begin by asking at least double the worth of his wares, and the buyer to offer less than half their value. Then the seller gradually decreases his price, and the buyer increases his offer, till a bargain is struck. But when once the seller has come down to a certain figure he never raises it again. In Corea they have some remarkable trade customs. One of these is exactly the reverse of the Western principle of making a reduction on taking a quantity. When in Seoul, I was told by foreign residents that if they wished to buy say twenty articles of a certain kind at native shops, they had to send servants out ten or twenty times to buy them in ones or twos, because if they ordered twenty at once the price would be immediately raised—perhaps in obedience to the economical law that an increased demand or a decreased supply enhances prices. But even in Corea they do not go back on their bargains. It is left to the Russian house-owner to agree for one price and then to demand a higher.

We were assisted in our little dispute with the yemshik over the fare by our Buriat Cossack friends, whom we had now caught up once more. They had been waiting at this post-station for the best part of a day, and had still to exercise their patience for a couple of hours before getting horses. I amused them for some time with a copy of Dr. Lansdell's 'Through Siberia,' which I kept always at hand for use as a guide-book. Dr. Lansdell's very accurate description of the country was of course beyond their comprehension, but in the illustrations they took the liveliest interest, and especially in the portraits of Buriats and representations of Buriat costume. At five in the evening



their horses were ready, but we had still two hours to remain

Just before the time for our departure a sledge drove up, and a Russian and his wife entered the station. We watched with intense interest while the gentleman divested himself of his furs, for if an official uniform were displayed beneath, we knew what we should have to expect. Of the three troikas kept at the station the Cossacks had two, and if the new-comers could present a Crown *podorozhnaya*, they would take the third and leave us in the lurch. Fortunately he proved to be a civilian, and we had the pleasure of seeing his face drop, and his wife's also, when they heard that we were just starting off with the only available troika, and that they would have to wait till the Cossack's horses had returned and rested. Presently the wife retired to the back and entered into an earnest conversation with the starosta. We suspected plotting, and we were not wrong. What the result would otherwise have been I do not know, but, as on a previous occasion, we again found a friend in the starosta's wife. She came and whispered to us that the Russian lady had been endeavouring to bribe or cajole the starosta into giving the only troika to her and her husband. But our friend had interfered in our behalf, and in a few minutes we were safely seated in our sledge and galloping away.

We tore along for a mile at a break-neck speed; and then suddenly the yemshik pulled up, and turning towards us asked us in which direction we wanted to go. His method of driving had already inspired us with grave doubts

as to the man's sobriety, and now our suspicions were converted into certainties. Luckily we were on the right road. It proved an exhilarating drive, but it was not the only one of the kind to which we were treated during that festive Christmas season. On one occasion a station-master actually admitted to us that we were delayed not for want of horses, but because there was not a single yemshik about the place who was sober enough to drive.

As soon as our yemshik was convinced that he was going in the right direction he started off once more, yelling at the top of his voice, slashing his whip, and tearing along at a furious gallop, sending us crashing over stumps of trees and rattling and bumping over obstructions of all kinds lying off the side of the road—for the greater part of his stage was overland, close by the bank of the river. Suddenly in the midst of one of these bumps the duga came flying off over the ears of the central horse, and before the team could be pulled up the sledge had passed over it.

The feat of fastening a heavy duga firmly in position is one requiring no little dexterity. The arch is kept in place mainly by the pressure of a shaft on either side of it, and to obtain the requisite amount of pressure the shafts have to be lashed tightly to the horse's collar with leather thongs. The thong, one end of which is fastened to the collar, is passed round the shaft, and then back through the collar again. The yemshik places his foot or his knee against the horse's collar, and, putting all his back into the work, pulls on the thong till the shaft is bent inwards on to the collar, and then makes all fast. He repeats the

operation on the opposite side till shafts, duga, and collar form one compact mass against which the centie horse pushes. It is a difficult feat, even for a sober ostler whose movements are encumbered by thick furs and skins, and to our inebriated yemshik the difficulties appeared almost insurmountable. For a time it was amusing to watch his fruitless efforts to balance himself on one foot while obtaining a purchase on the horse-collar with the other, but after about twenty minutes the amusement began to pall on us. If we had had an interpreter with us we could have added a choice stock of words to our Russian vocabulary, for every fresh failure was the signal for a storm of anathemas to be hurled at the inoffensive horse, which stood the very picture of patience while its head was hauled from side to side, and again and again the half-fixed duga fell clattering on its back. But in the absence of an interpreter we could only console ourselves with reflections on the marvellous spirit of conservatism which marks the Russian's attachment to that heavy, unwieldy, and utterly useless encumbrance, the duga.

At length the task was accomplished satisfactorily, and we once more dashed away in the moonlight. The wooden arch shook and rattled ominously, but it kept its place. Soon we descended an incline to the river, but our driver did not deign to slacken his pace. The road had been cut obliquely down the low back in order to lessen its declivity, but scorning such devices the yemshik made straight for the river. For the last three or four feet the bank rose almost perpendicular, but the horses took the jump fearlessly,

for a moment our sledge was suspended in mid-air, and then, with a crash which nearly sent our heads through the hood, we alighted safely on the ice. We enjoyed that dive, but we could not repress a feeling of thankfulness when we drew up safely at the next post-station.

Here we once more caught up our Cossack friends, and found that they also were bent on Christmas festivities. Schnapps and vodka were circulating freely, and we discovered by experiment that the Buriat palate can appreciate the delicacy of German sausage and good French brandy. Either from lack of horses or from an excess of festivity on the part of the yemshiks, we were again delayed for the night. But their libations had not destroyed the native courtesy of the Buriats. Returning to an unfurnished room adjoining, they left my companion and myself in sole possession of the guest-room, and we passed a very comfortable night upon the floor.

All next morning we travelled in company with the Cossacks, our sledge always bringing up the rear of the procession of three. The route lay mainly by land, and we passed through more than one large village with its wooden church rearing aloft the pointed cupola with which we had now grown familiar. Often, too, we passed through woods and over hilly country, beautiful even in this winter season. Early in the afternoon we arrived at Vaganova, a lonely post-station on the bank of the Amur. Only two troikas were available, and as the Cossacks were before us we were left behind with seven hours to wait.

The little piece of ground overlooking the river upon which the station stood appeared to be an artificial clearing from the forest which stretched away behind it. Among the trees, to within a few yards of the house, the snow was dotted with the hoof-marks of herds of deer, for in all this region deer abounded, and many of the station-masters and yemshiks appeared to combine with their Government employment a little hunting for venison and deer-skins. For a few shillings my companion was able to buy a large deer-skin cloak which even in Tomsk would have cost three or four times the money, and on one occasion while at a post-station we saw a sledge drive up on which were a dozen frozen carcasses of deer.

But strolling about looking at deer spoors soon palled on us, and after making a hearty meal of a capital perog of sturgeon-flesh, made by the starosta's wife for the yemshiks, we were glad to find ourselves gliding up the river once more under a bright full moon. On arriving next morning at the village of Permikina we were surprised to see in the station-yard the familiar form of a huge vashok and on entering the guest-room we found it occupied by our old friend the Russian officer with his wife and three little gals, whom we had last encountered some hundreds of versts behind. During our five days' stay at Blagovestchensk they had caught and passed us, but as they stopped at night and we travelled continuously, we had, in spite of our numerous delays and their Crown podorozhnaya, rapidly been gaining on them.

When we entered the station the mother was engaged in converting her children by successive wrappings into little animated balls of fur, but she stopped to exchange greetings with us. Soon the hearse, as we had dubbed the great vehicle, rattled off with its five horses, and an hour later we sped after it. In the next stage a heavy jolting over rough ice resulted in the smashing of an outrigger and a horse-bai, but a carpenter at the next village soon replaced the broken gear. It was interesting to note the dexterity with which, using no other tool than an axe, he chipped two ash-poles into shape, but it was not pleasant to watch him working gloveless in the cold air, the blood dripping from innumerable chaps and cracks in his wrinkled hands. Nevertheless the whole village, whose time did not appear to be very valuable, crowded out of their houses into the station-yard to watch the operation.

Towards nightfall we approached the historical town of Albazin, the oldest in Eastern Siberia. At the last station before reaching it we found the starosta absent, and a party of yemshiks and guls feasting and merrymaking. No horses were to be had for three or four hours, we were told, but we had a shrewd suspicion that the yemshiks were simply loth to leave the feast, so we determined to try what a little raving and bullying would effect. It acted like a charm. We were soon tearing along towards Albazin with a highly elevated yemshik on the box. We entered the town at a furious gallop, sending men, women, and children flying into their houses in all directions. Presently a dog ran barking across the road, and our horses shied;

the sledge swerved round and shaved the corner of a house, and for a few seconds we were in imminent danger of a terrible smash. But the yemshik managed to regain command of his team, and we drew up in safety at the post-station of Albazin.

## CHAPTER X

## ALBAZIN TO STRETENSK

Chernigovski—Albazin and its sieges—An elevated stanosta—Embarrassing hospitality—The sentinel deserts his post—Off to Stretensk—An unfortunate family—Gently down hill—The Buriats again—An irascible Polish exile—Farewell to the Cossacks—Up the Shulka River—The Seven Cardinal Sins—Restless repose—Returning horses—Good-bye to the vashok—A Chinese merchant—Stretensk—A rude hotel—English again—A transmitting station—Tapping the wires—Borsh and pilgrimages—On the road again.

To outward appearance Albazin is only a mean little Siberian village, but historically it is the most interesting town eastward of the Baikal Sea. From the river one still sees the remains of the fortifications erected by Nikitao Chernigovski more than two hundred years ago. This Chernigovski was a runaway exile, who, with a band of followers desperate as himself, set up his camp here on Chinese soil, built fortifications, pillaged the native tribes of the surrounding districts, founded villages, obtained the pardon of the Czar, and raised himself from the status of an escaped convict to that of a distinguished and successful general. The Chinese did not submit quietly to this invasion of their territory. In 1685 they attacked Albazin, and after an eighteen days' siege they compelled the garrison to sur-



rendered, and, after allowing them to return to Nerchinsk, destroyed the fort. No sooner, however, had the conquerors returned than the vanquished returned, repaired their fort, and remained in possession till the following year, when a second siege by the Chinese was only raised in view of the treaty negotiations between Russia and China at Nerchinsk, which ended in the restitution to China of Albazin and all the surrounding territory. For upwards of 160 years Albazin remained in undisputed possession of the Celestials, but in 1848 Russian colonising enterprise again directed its attention to this not very attractive region; and then began the series of annexations and negotiations which ended in 1860 with the cession to Russia of the whole of the territory lying on the northern bank of the Amur River, and the coast of Manchuria down to the frontiers of Corea.

The night was beginning to close in as we dashed into Albazin, but, despite the gathering darkness and the headlong speed of our progression, we saw quite enough to convince us that the few remaining relics of the age of Chernigovski, interesting as they might be, would scarcely repay us for a lengthened halt. We therefore determined to continue our journey as soon as we had dined.

But here a difficulty intervened. Entering the post-station a few minutes after my companion, laden with provisions from the sledge, I found him folded in the embrace of an aged and particularly dumpy Siberian, who was evidently in an advanced stage of inebriety, while two of our Buriat Cossack friends lay stretched out on the floor, watching the little comedy with evident amusement.

Having avoided a salute from the drunken starosta's lips, and disengaged himself from the old man's embrace, Uien informed me that the fellow had been begging for money to buy vodka, and had been evincing his gratitude on the receipt of a few kopeks

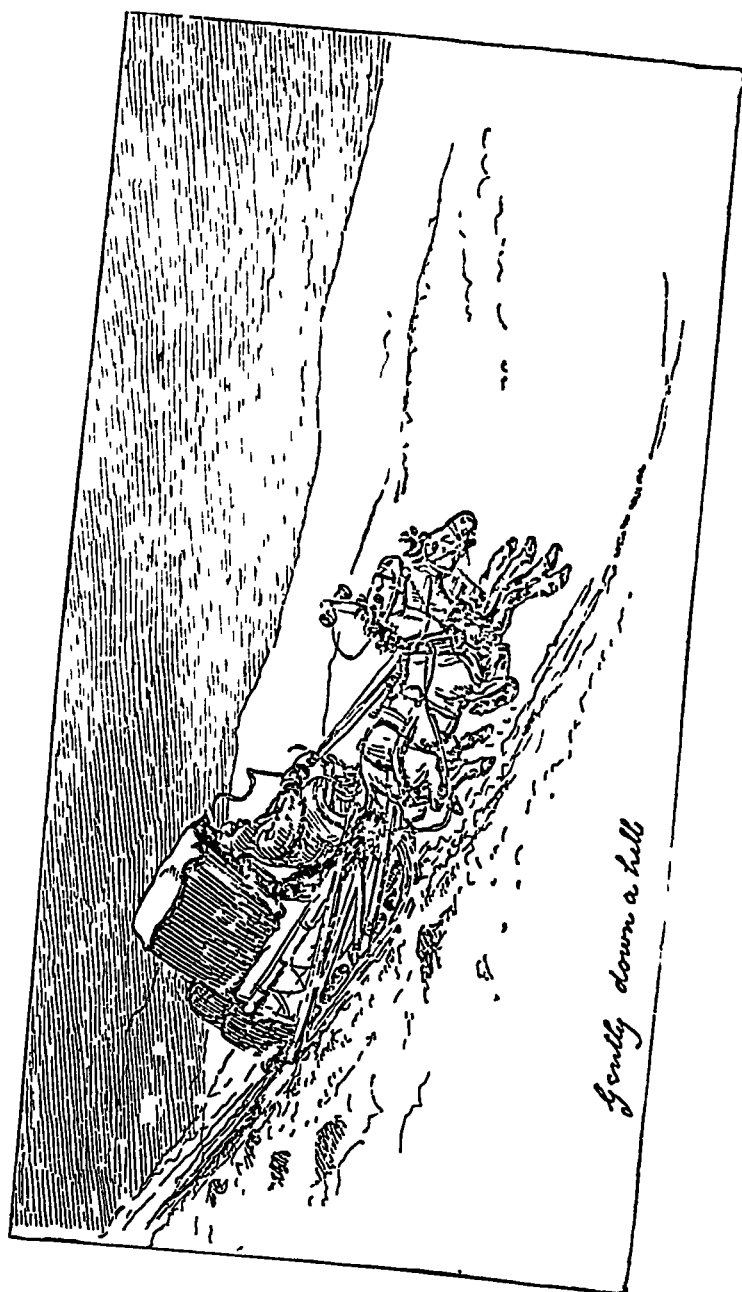
Could we have horses? Oh, yes, but we must drink first with mine host. A few more kopeks and he would have sufficient to buy a small bottle of vodka. We demurred, but finally yielded to the old man's importunity. His gratitude was overwhelming. I find it recorded in my notebook that he shook hands 213 times, and wanted to kiss us. The number of handshakes may not be absolutely accurate, but it is nearer the mark than might be supposed. Then the old fellow staggered out in search of the wineshop, but soon returned in a state of depression—the shops were closed. Never mind, we could have our carousal in the morning! We again demurred. We wished to proceed at once. But that was impossible, there were no post-horses to be had. We argued the point, and meanwhile the starosta invited himself to supper with us. His manner of feeding was peculiar. Cutting a thick slice of bread, he piled on to it a mixture of butter, mustard, mutton, and jam, the whole of which disappeared with amazing rapidity.

Could we have private horses? Oh, yes. A bargain was soon struck, but presently we found that there were no yemshiks to be had. Never mind, the starosta would drive us himself. The road was bad, and perhaps a little dangerous, and he did not relish turning out at night, but to

serve us ! The starosta's wife looked troubled. She evidently doubted whether her husband was in a fit condition to manage a troika on a dangerous road, and either out of consideration for her, or from a craven fear for our own carcasses, we cried off the bargain and prepared ourselves for a night's rest with a roof over our heads.

But our sledge standing in the open street—might it not be pillaged during the night? Would it not be better to unload it? The starosta knew a better way—he and I together with difficulty dragged the heavy sledge round to a corner of the open yard, behind the post-station, and the starosta's dog was made fast to the vehicle with an improvised chain and collar. Then, returning to the guest-room, Uren and I threw our sheepskin coats upon the floor beside our Buriat friends and were about to compose ourselves to sleep. But presently the starosta drew a ragged and not over-clean cotton mattress from the curtained-off corner where he and his wife slept, and offered it to us for our use. It did not look altogether tempting, he would have been a bold man who would have guaranteed its freedom from insect life. But it would have been as much opposed to the laws of Siberian etiquette as to those of natural courtesy to have spurned so generous a loan, we therefore expressed our gratitude, stretched ourselves out on the bed, and were soon asleep.

Two or three hours later I awoke, feeling a little uneasy about our belongings, for a few tins of provisions, which we could ill spare, had already been pilfered from the sledge at various times, and I did not feel very confident about the



*Gently down a hill*

security of the starosta's arrangements. Slipping on my felt boots, I went to reassure myself. The sledge seemed all right. There were the improvised dog-collar and chain, and there, on the snow, was the mat put out for the dog to lie upon. But no dog was to be seen. However, there was nothing to be done but to trust in Providence, so I returned to bed.

In the morning the starosta's manner was strangely subdued. He was suffering severely from a swollen head. He made no reference to the promised carousal, but busied himself in speeding our departure. A spin of twenty miles brought us to Orlova, where we found encamped in the post-station a Russian civilian, his wife, and their family of half a dozen children, who for thirty-six hours had been waiting there for horses. A post had just come in, and had again disappointed them by taking the only two remaining troikas, and they had therefore no hopes of continuing their journey for another twelve hours at least. By the judicious expenditure of a few roubles, however, we got horses from the village. Soon we experienced a change of scenery, as, to avoid the windings of the river, we crossed a hilly neck of land. In the midst of thick woods, which here and there showed where the axe had been at work, we climbed hills and slid down descents so steep that every minute or two the horses had to be turned sharp round so as to bring the runners side-on to the road, and prevent the sledge from taking charge and coming to a smash at the bottom of the hill.

Towards night we arrived at Sverbieva, a village of half

a dozen houses, where at the post-station we came up with the remainder of the little Cossack party. They too had been suffering from the dearth of horses. For twenty-four hours they had been waiting at this little village. One of them, with kindly intent, seized the pillows in our sledge, and was proceeding to carry them into the house, saying we should certainly have to put up for the night, but fortunately we found that, small as the village was, it boasted a private house-owner, and for double fares in two hours we were once more on the road.

At midnight we were met at the door of the post-station of Sgibnieva by the station-master, a tall, gaunt Pole, who told us that he had been exiled as a revolutionist four-and-twenty years before. From the drawer of the guest-room table he produced a little Franco-Polish Dictionary, and he could even remember a word or two of German, a language with which he professed to have been tolerably familiar in the days of his prosperity. He was doubtless an estimable man, and certainly of much more polished manners than the average Siberian post-master, but twenty-four years of exile had apparently not altogether subdued the natural nascibility of temper which was no doubt a valuable quality in a revolutionist.

All this time we had a pretty shrewd idea of the main cause of our constant delays for want of horses. Our friend the military officer was keeping just ahead of us with his five-horse hearse, and taking from the stations all the animals not required for the postal service. Sleeping by night in the post-stations, and encumbered with *impedimenta*

in the shape of wife and children, it was impossible for him, despite the alacrity inspired by his exalted office, to cover more than seventy or eighty miles a day, and he prevented us from doing more. Could we once manage to get past him, we felt confident that our difficulties would be at an end. Therefore, when our revolutionist host informed us that he should be glad to speed us on our journey with post-horses at 2 P.M. on the following day, we once more suggested private horses.

The Pole responded with alacrity. He could get us horses from the village for four roubles. The tariff two-horse fare was only Rs. 1.65, but we closed with the offer, and a messenger was despatched for the horses. We waited, at first patiently, then impatiently. At the end of an hour and a half we began to make frequent inquiries of the starosta as to when we might expect the arrival of the quadrupeds. 'Sei chas' was of course the reply. We might have guessed it without disturbing mine host in the small hours of the morning, and there was perhaps some excuse for the Pole's conduct when, after the third repetition of the question, he rushed into the room in a fury, threw our papers on the table, and retired precipitately to bed. But he was soon up again, for a few minutes later there arrived, not the horses, but at least a horse-owner, who professed his readiness to forward us a stage for five roubles. This was the last straw. We refused to pay more than the stipulated sum, left the starosta and the hoisy individual to fight the matter out, curled up on our rugs, and fell asleep while the altercation was in progress. As a Russian

never wakes a sleeping man, we were left in peace, and it was daylight when we woke. While we were discussing breakfast our Buriat friends arrived. We extended to them a welcome which in our heart of hearts we did not feel, for we had cordially hoped ere this to have seen the last of them for ever. We renewed overtures for private horses, split the difference in terms, got away two hours ahead of the Buriats, and never saw them again.

All this time, since leaving Khabarovka, our course had lain along the ice or by the banks of the Amur River, but now, on the afternoon of January 11, the piled-up masses of ice which obstructed our course on the river told us that we were approaching the place of the meeting of the waters of its two constituents, the Argun and the Shilka. Leaving the little village of Ust Stailka away to the left, we passed up the mouth of the Shilka, and at length turned our backs on the Celestial Empire, along whose boundary line we had been travelling now for nearly fifteen hundred miles.

With the change of river we experienced an entire change of scenery. Thickly wooded lofty hills sloped upwards from the very brink of the river, so that in many places long cuttings had had to be made in the forest to allow of the erection of the telegraph line. Signs of life were fewer here than in the desolate regions through which we had been passing, and even where the river was for a brief space tortuous, the hilly banks and absence of anything approaching the similitude of a road prevented the possibility of short cuts, and kept us rigorously to the icy highway.



We feared that further troubles were in store for us, for in a few miles we should enter the region of the 'Seven Cardinal Sins'—seven post-stations so known to old Siberian travellers by reason of their proverbial discomforts and the impossibility of obtaining at them even the bare necessities of life. It was half-past four on the morning of the Russian New Year's Eve when we arrived at Utesna, the first of the Seven Sins, and here at length we came up level with the military officer with whom we had been racing. Early as it was, he rose at once on our arrival, greeted us, and ordered the only available post-horses, for although there were three troikas at the station, a post was expected and they refused to let the third three horses go. We expostulated vehemently, and our military friend came to our assistance, but whether he was really very solicitous on our behalf I am now much inclined to doubt. Under ordinary circumstances he was a mild-mannered man, with a terrible cough—a cough which, when it once fairly commenced, did not 'let up' for even a second, till man and cough were both exhausted. Travelling by day over ice and snow packed with four others in a vashok, almost hermetically sealed, and sleeping by night in overheated post-stations, seemed scarcely the regimen best suited for his complaint.

But presently something went wrong in the station-master's arrangements, and the colonel soon made it evident that neither his energy nor the power of his lungs was seriously injured. The unfortunate starosta seemed ready to sink into his shoes as the officer paced up and

down the guest-room raging and anathematising. The fit lasted, too, even longer than his coughing bouts; and meantime my comrade and I were vainly endeavouring to make up arrears of sleep. Presently a servant entered, and in removing the samovar, sent a little shower of water splashing in my face as I lay upon the floor. Just then a traveller entered, and threw down all his furs on Uien's prostrate body. His apologies were profuse, but my companion and I abandoned for the time all attempts to sleep. And it was fortunate we did, for we discovered that the new-comer was travelling eastward, and though it is contrary to Government rules for returning horses to take passengers, a little palm-oil smoothed the way, and soon after daylight we were once more on the road, only some eight or ten miles behind the vashok.

The 'Seven Cardinal Sins' scarcely deserve to-day their evil reputation. Some of them have surely been rebuilt, for we found them among the roomiest and most comfortable stations we had yet encountered. Food was certainly very difficult to procure, but as in winter one carries his provisions with him, this would have mattered little but for the fact that we were anxious to make all possible speed, and viands solidified by ninety degrees of frost take time when fires are low to bring into an edible condition. The horses, too, were small and feeble, and the rate of progress was anything but fast.

It was nearing midday when the Second Sin was reached, and we were getting hungry, but even black bread was denied us, and milk was here an unknown luxury. At

at Chita. Accustomed as were my companion and myself to the rigorous line which divides the social lives of Chinamen and Englishmen in Hongkong and the treaty ports of China, we could not help noticing the very intimate terms which appeared to subsist between the Chinaman and his Russian fellow-traveller, who seemed to be a merchant of some standing. It is one of the secrets of Russian success in Central Asia that the Slav—perhaps on account of the Tatar blood in him, which is ever to be found by scratching—is readier than the Saxon to overstep socially the boundary line which is too apt to separate the ‘white man’ from the coloured.

By daylight we had left the last of the Cardinal Sins behind, and were once more sledging through a comparatively thickly populated region. Round every post-station was a village of at least two dozen houses. Food, too, was plentiful. At Shilkma we obtained a really excellent basin of cabbage soup from the family pot. It was the Russian New Year’s Day, and it may be that a few extra ingredients had been put into the national dish in honour of the occasion; anyhow, plentifully seasoned as it was with the sauce of hunger, it seemed as excellent a dish as could possibly be set before a traveller.

The little town of Stretensk presented a pretty and a peculiarly welcome sight as we approached it on the following morning. Its population scarcely entitles it to rank as anything more than a village, even among the sparsely inhabited townships of Eastern Siberia, but, being built on the pattern of a mathematical line along the right bank of

the Shilka, it presents from the river the appearance of quite a large and thriving city. It derives its importance from the fact that it is situated at the utmost limit of steam navigation on the great central waterway of Asia. From here during the summer the little steamers start which make their way to the Pacific coast at Nikolaevsk. Had we chosen the summer for our journey, we should only now have commenced our experience of the great posting system of Siberia, instead of having accomplished nearly half our posting journey.

As a port of navigation, Stretensk naturally boasts an hotel, where we were able to obtain a room for our brief stay. It measured some twelve feet square, and of this limited space scarcely less than a quarter was occupied by the great brick stove. The furniture consisted of a single narrow wooden bench, intended for a bedstead, two chairs, two pieces of chintz attached to the window-frames with twine, and a row of hatpegs.

Rough as this accommodation was, however, we revelled in the unwonted luxury of an undisturbed night's repose between the four walls of a well-warmed room. For sledging day and night, obtaining only snatches of sleep in the open air of frosty nights, however novel and exhilarating an experience, tends after a time to become somewhat monotonous and fatiguing, even when the course winds along the smooth ice of a magnificent river. The cold, too, had now reached its greatest intensity. A spirit thermometer exposed in the town on the previous night had registered  $42^{\circ}$  Réaumur of frost, equal to  $-62\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$

Fahrenheit, or  $94\frac{1}{2}$  degrees of frost, and there is no reason to doubt that on the river where we had spent the night the cold had been no less severe than in the town.

We allowed ourselves four-and-twenty hours to explore the town and recruit our energies, and our brief stay was made pleasant to us by the discovery of a friend in Mr. Timm, a German merchant to whom we brought a note of introduction from a friend in Vladivostok. We were unexpectedly cheered, too, by the sound of our own language, for, having sallied forth in search of the telegraph station, we noticed an official with flashes of forked lightning represented on his silvered buttons, and, rightly judging him to be a telegraphist, we inquired our way in the best Russian we could command, and were surprised at receiving an answer in the English language. The Stretensk telegraph office proved to be a transmitting station, and as such it necessarily had attached to it an English-speaking clerk. The operators were hard at work in the office when we entered, and my companion, who could readily gather the meaning of the messages by listening to the clicking of the instrument, obtained some important news which was passing along the wire to an English merchant in Japan. Professional etiquette prevented him from imparting the news to me, but the incident enlightened us as to the ease with which anyone familiar with the Morse alphabet might tap the wires in Siberia were it worth his while.

The streets of Stretensk offered little to attract the eye beyond the one great wooden church with its customary

pointed dome and numerous crosses with their triple transverse beams, but the numerous Teutonic names which could be distinguished through the Russian characters over the windows of the shops showed how far inland the German influence had extended. Soon after noon on the day succeeding our arrival we repacked our sledge and started off once more, having replenished our stock of provisions with a supply of two noted Russian delicacies, *borsh* and *pilménies*. *Borsh* is a curiously flavoured species of thick soup, and *pilménies* are little meat patties of about the diameter of a halfpenny or a penny, which, when frozen, may be reduced to an edible condition by merely being thrown into hot soup or boiling water. The *borsh* was brought to us in the form of a single lump of muddy-looking ice which had the appearance of having been set out to freeze in a bucket. We had subsequently to reduce it to a more manageable condition by chopping it to pieces with an axe. When thawed and boiled the *borsh* proved nourishing and filling, but there was a certain twanginess of flavour that was not altogether agreeable, and the *pilménies* proved both doughy and insipid. Often did we regretfully remember the bag of excellent provisions (now emptied of all but a remnant of the joint of beef, which we carried with us as a relic to *Trumen*) with which we had been provided by our friends at *Blagovestchensk*.

## CHAPTER XI

## STRETENSK TO VERKHNE UDINSK

The shallow Shilka—An infantile jemshuk—In a snowdrift—A novel 'equipage'—Nerchinsk—A millionaire's palace—Chita—A snowless tract—Siberian fires—Taïantas travelling—A convict train—An attack on the post—Double murder and robbery—The Yablonoï Mountains—Our sledge again—The shrine on the mountains—A smash—The land of the Buriats—The taïantas once more—A long cold ride—Through the woods—The Uda River—Verkhne Udinsk

A SPIR of sixty miles up the Shilka brought us to Nerchinsk, the ancient capital of the Trans-Baikal Province. In summer the shallowing of the waters compels the traveller westward-bound to take to the road at Stretensk, but there is in winter quite sufficient water to form a smooth ice road, and up this we sledged. Parties of travellers were frequently met, for there is a pretty constant stream of traffic between Nerchinsk and Stretensk, and we had been advised that the difficulty of obtaining post-horses here would be so great that it would be to our advantage to make a bargain with some private horse-owner in Stretensk to transport us from one town to the other. Siberia has, however, to some slight extent, moved forward with the times. Except in the Amur Province and the Littoral, the posting service has been improved wherever the traffic has increased.

With the exception of one delay of half a dozen hours, the only difficulty with horses which we experienced on the road to Nerchinsk was when we obtained the services of a driver over whose head scarce twelve exceedingly short summers had passed

The Siberian system of harnessing is one which necessitates frequent descents from the box-seat to remedy defects. Our little driver was so small that after each of his periodical descents for this purpose he experienced the greatest possible difficulty in climbing back into his seat, and his troubles were enhanced by the fact that Siberian horses rarely wait till the yemshuk is on the box before they gallop off. In the course of one of the boy's oft-recurring struggles to reseat himself, the horses swerved off the road and plunged into a deep bank of drifted snow, from which, without assistance, extrication proved quite impossible. Fortunately we were near the end of the stage. A walk of a few hundred yards brought us to a post-station, and here we quietly dined while waiting till the sledge and its contents were in some manner dragged out and brought in safety to the station door.

At one station we noticed a novelty in the way of 'equipages,' as the Russians call all passenger vehicles. It was a large vashok or inclosed sledge through the roof of which an iron chimney projected. Its owner, who was travelling with his wife, was evidently a man of some importance, for servants followed behind him in a sledge open in front like our own. But we did not feel in the least inclined to envy him his stove. The atmosphere inside



that tight-closed box with its fireplace can scarcely have compared favourably with the clear bracing air, however cold, outside. But its owner compelled our respect, for he was the first Siberian who had yet refused a *petit verre* of cognac from our flask. His account of the road before us was anything but cheerful. The ways beyond Chita were, he told us, very rough and quite devoid of snow, and the transport of our sledge would prove no easy matter.

Early next morning we turned sharp round to the right up the Nercha, a northern tributary of the Shilka, and soon came in sight of the important town of Nerchinsk stretching away on its left bank.

Nerchinsk, founded in 1658, some twenty years before Chernigovski set up his camp at Albazin, is one of the oldest Russian towns in the whole of Eastern Siberia. Like Albazin, however, though in a less degree, its glories have to a great extent departed. The seat of government of the province has been transferred to Chita, and its wooden houses, albeit of a more pretentious style than any which the westward-bound traveller will have seen, have an aspect of decay about them. Nerchinsk, however, still boasts one great glory, the palace of M. Bootin, the millionaire and philanthropist of Siberia, the owner of gold mines who presses nuggets upon his visitors as parting gifts. I did not visit M. Bootin, but a notice of Nerchinsk, however brief, which did not contain an account of his famous mansion, would be like the proverbial play with the title-role omitted.

M. Edmond Cotteau, who visited M. Bootin in the summer of 1881, describes his mansion as 'a magnificent

dwelling, a reminiscence of M Bootin's travels, into which he has put something of every style. The architecture is bizarre, and of questionable taste. The exterior view shows only battlemented walls pierced with Gothic windows, Renaissance portals, Byzantine façades flanked with Arab towers, the whole, in white stone, presenting the appearance of some fairy fortress. Nevertheless the *ensemble* is majestic. This enormous mass, rising on one side of a vast, bare and deserted space, and dominating in all its pride the poor constructions of wood which surround it, is of a really imposing effect. The interior is not less singular. It contains a sumptuous dwelling-house, magnificent *salons*, a theatre, a printing-office, shops, offices, magazines, and warehouses of merchandise, and lastly a vast library and collections of every kind. A beautiful garden, adorned with statuary and perfectly kept, with fountains, artificial grottoes, a labyrinth, conservatories, masses of flowers and shrubs, all show what can be done in this country by a man intelligent and rich. A *parterre* has been reserved for the culture of flowers which grow naturally in the neighbouring fields, and this is not the least resplendent. It is the only garden worthy of the name which I saw in Siberia.

Staying at Nerchinsk only long enough to change our tired horses, we redescended the Nercha River to its junction with the Ingoda, and, ascending the latter stream, scudded along a thirty-mile stage at a rattling gallop. It was the longest stage we had yet encountered, but with good horses and a capital yemshuk we succeeded in covering the distance in a trifle over three hours, a time which had sometimes

been exceeded on a stage of scarcely more than half the length. Once an obstruction on the road nearly overturned the sledge, but the outrigger saved us. The driver was thrown completely off the box, but he kept a tight hand on the reins, and, though the horses scarcely relaxed their gallop, he managed, encumbered as he was with furs, to regain his seat and continue the journey without even stopping to shake himself together.

Our river travelling was now rapidly drawing to an end. For more than two thousand miles we had been sledging almost continuously along the Amur or its tributaries, but from Chita onwards our course was to be over roads which within the memory of man can surely have never been subjected to any species of repair. Nor was this the worst of our difficulties. For some reason, unexplained so far as I can ascertain by meteorologists, all snow-clouds religiously avoid the town of Chita and its vicinity, consequently it is almost always necessary for the traveller to here discard his sledge and resign himself to the discomforts of tarantass travelling. As we neared Chita we ascertained more clearly at every step that we were not to escape the common fate. The fallen snow grew thinner and thinner till the hills about the river were almost bare, and at every post-station as we ascended the bank, our runners grated painfully over sand and stone.

It was long past midnight on the third day of our journey from Stretensk when we arrived at the capital of the Trans-Baikal Province. The post-station of Chita was away in the centre of the town, far from the edge of the

live! , and the task of dragging the heavy sledge along the snowless streets proved so severe a strain upon our tired horses that humanity compelled us to alight and tramp

The rest of the night was occupied in preparations for the altered conditions under which we were now to travel. After much bargaining the station-master undertook to provide us with three extra horses to drag our empty sledge some thirty miles over the snowless tract, and a large heavy tarantas, with a hood to protect us from the wind, was brought forth and loaded with our baggage.

Long before our preparations were completed, the day dawned, and clouds of blue smoke began to ascend from every chimney in the town. Twice a day in all Siberian towns and villages this curious sight is to be witnessed, but it is prettiest in the rosy hues of dawn. Almost simultaneously from every chimney the wreaths of pale blue smoke from the wood fires begin to curl upward, then gradually they die away, and till the approach of evening the air remains perfectly clear. For somewhere about dawn and dusk are the hours of stoking. Piles of huge wood-logs are then heaped up in the vast stoves and fired. When they have ceased to smoke the chimney is closed, vent-holes leading into the rooms are opened, and the air heated by passing over the mass of glowing embers within the stove is allowed to enter freely into the house. Between these two periods of the day the stoves are seldom replenished, and the traveller who arrives at a post-station when the fires are low often finds it extremely difficult to obtain a meal.

Three hours later we were once more under way, seated on the top of our baggage and rattling in a tarantas through the broad streets of Chita. The town was almost a facsimile of those through which we had passed farther east, though a slightly better finish and a little more ornamentation about the fronts of the houses marked our advance towards civilisation. Our revolvers were within easy reach on our waist-belts, for the station-master of Chita had warned us with a scared face that highway men were abroad, a murderous attack having been made on the post a few hours before.

Soon after leaving the town we met a small party of convicts, among whom were two women, trudging along under the escort of two soldiers with fixed bayonets. Subsequently we met some two or three larger bodies of convicts travelling eastwards under guard of considerable numbers of soldiers, and once or twice in the early mornings we saw them trooping out in shoals from the *étapes* or temporary prisons set up as resting-places for them on their journey. They always appeared warmly clothed, and they were generally accompanied by a few rough sledges in which the sick and weakly rode. Miserable as was their condition, and dreadful doubtless as was the prospect before them, they yet found spirit to join their voices in singing as they marched along.

Arrived at the first station a scene of intense excitement reminded us of the warning we had received at Chita. Within the house a civil officer dressed in the uniform of a police master was engaged in earnest conversation with a

number of villagers, among whom was one whose long black cloak and hair falling to below the shoulders proclaimed him a priest of the national religion. Outside, men on horseback were rushing to and fro, and an excited crowd had gathered to see what was going forward. Proceeding in another tarantas we soon made a wide detour to avoid a spot upon the road where two dead horses were lying, and subsequently we gathered bit by bit the details of the occurrence which had caused this unusual excitement.

On the previous day, as two tarantases conveying the mails were passing along the road under guard of two yemshiks and a postman, two men with masked faces, splendidly mounted, galloped up and fired at the post-horses, killing two of them, and thus bringing the waggons to a stand. Among the mail-bags was one containing a quantity of raw gold from the Siberian mines, to the value, we were told, of many thousands of roubles. One of the ruffians accosted the postman, and pointing a revolver at his head demanded this bag. The postman, being also aimed, drew his own revolver and snapped it at his assailant, but without effect, as the striking point of the hammer had been at some previous period carefully filed down by an accomplice of the robbers. The other masked man then called out to his companion, 'What are you talking to him for? Shoot him,' and the postman was at once shot dead. A yemshik was also shot, but whether he was killed outright or only wounded we did not clearly ascertain. The robbers then seized the mail-bags containing the gold and made off with it. The whole outrage had been

so carefully planned, and showed so intimate a knowledge of the facts connected with the transport of the gold, that suspicion at once fell upon the post-office officials, one of whom, a Jew, was arrested on suspicion of complicity, but up to the time we left Irkutsk the actual assassins had not been arrested, though a cordon of soldiers was drawn round the district for the purpose of preventing their escape.

Before nightfall we had arrived at a village at the foot of the little range of hills known as the Yablonoi Mountains, and here we found our sledge waiting for us beside the station door. The starosta, as was often the case, was represented by a small boy, who insisted that it was impossible for us to proceed in our sledge, and finally after some wrangling we agreed to put up for the night and await the station-master's return. The motion of a sledge is luxury compared with the jolting of a springless waggon over rough, frozen roads; and we felt quite grateful for a little difficulty in the way of our proceeding which afforded us a reasonable excuse for taking a night's rest stretched out on the post-station floor with our knapsacks of money under our heads, our baggage lying around us, and, mindful of the Chita station-master's warning, our loaded revolvers at hand. In the middle of the night I was disturbed by a noise, and on opening one eye I found that it was caused by the entrance of two travellers, but, as there was nothing particularly bloodthirsty about their appearance, I added my snores to those of my companion and left our worldly goods at their mercy.

Though most Siberian travellers go armed against

robbers on the road, thefts at the post-stations must be comparatively rare, judging by the reckless manner in which passengers leave their property lying loose around them while they sleep. At one station in the midst of a big town a man lay sleeping on a couch in the guest-room into which we were ushered, with his watch and chain and a number of other small articles lying on a table near him. Open bags were strewn all over the guest-room floor, and although there were two of his fellow-passengers in the room they too were fast asleep, and had a thief entered the station he would have had no difficulty in pocketing an amount of 'swag' which would have kept him in affluence for a week or two.

The next morning our difficulty with the station-master was easily smoothed by a little extra payment, and we were soon once more comfortably ensconced in the old sledge and winding slowly up the hillside. The layer of snow was still so thin that the traffic on the highway had left the sandy road quite bare, and for the most part we made our way through narrow, winding by-paths cut through the thick wood. The summit of the pass over the little mountain range—the highest point of land we touched during our whole sledge journey—was marked by a small shrine, in front of which the yemshik descended and religiously crossed himself before proceeding.

Just after we had left the mountains behind, we were delayed once more by one of the many annoying accidents which try the patience of Siberian travellers. Halfway between two stations the band of iron underlying one of the



runners broke in two and curled up in a bunch beneath the sledge. We dismounted, and the yemshik, with the assistance of a peasant who was passing with a caravan of hay sledges, propped up our sledge and tore off the iron with his axe. At the next village it was quickly welded together and replaced by a Buriat blacksmith.

For we were now in the midst of the Buriat country. Our yemshiks, and many even of the station-masters, were members of that dark-skinned Mongol race. For the most part the Buriats of Siberia have now become pretty thoroughly Russianised. Their old tent-like dwellings, with a hole in the roof for the smoke to escape by, are but rarely seen, the Russian log-houses having taken their places, and even their dress is scarcely distinguishable from that of their Slavonic fellow-subjects.

At the village of Pogliominsk next morning we were offered an unaccustomed luxury in the shape of eggs. They had apparently been cooked and then frozen, and the process of thawing had not been very perfectly accomplished. They were served up in a dish of cold water, and altogether there was little about their flavour to remind us of the English new-laid egg or the lay of the noble bird of Shanghai, but with appetites whetted by the bracing frosty air we disposed of a goodly number, and packed away a further stock for future use. As we proceeded, the snow under the sledge gradually thinned once more, and a few miles farther on we had again to take to the tarantas.

Although it wanted yet an hour or two of midday when we arrived at the station where the change was to

be made, a family rejoicing appeared to be at its height, and the vodka had evidently been circulating freely. We received a cordial invitation from the lady of the house, who was by no means the least elated of the party, to join in the festivity. But we resisted all her blandishments, and succeeded at length in striking a bargain by which our sledge should be dragged empty for two stages, while we proceeded by tarantas.

Having packed our luggage in the little hooded waggon, and with difficulty stretched ourselves out upon our traps, we composed ourselves to bear with as much patience as possible the discomforts of tarantas travelling. Though the thermometer had risen perhaps twenty degrees since we left Stretensk, a keen wind blowing straight in our teeth, and piercing the crazy hood which was our only protection against it, caused us, almost for the first time, to realise thoroughly the rigour of a Siberian winter. Cramped in the comfortless vehicle, rattling and bumping over a hard rough road for weary hour after hour, with the dreary prospect of unpacking and repacking our baggage at each station, we, not quite for the first time, felt just a shadow of an inclination to regret the infatuation which had induced us to prefer this mode of travelling home to the comforts and luxuries of a mail-steamer.

At length, however, our miseries were at an end. At midnight we arrived at the little village of Onimsk, soothed by the comforting reflection that snow and ice would never again fail us till we reached the land of railways. Since our breakfast of eggs in the morning, fifteen hours before,

our only refreshment had been a glass of milk and a slice of black bread, but a pan of rabchicks were soon thawed and brought in smoking hot, and in little more than an hour we were once more in our sledge

Our road now lay through a beautiful country, cutting frequently through extensive forests of pines and silver



birches, looking exceedingly beautiful in their winter coats of snow and hoar-frost. Since leaving the river at Chita we had once more had the verst-posts with us, the curious poles painted in broad diagonal bands of white and black—the sign-manual of the Russian Government—and serving the purpose of mile-stones, marking the distances to the nearest station in either direction. At the stations, too, the posts would sometimes tell the distances to important towns—to Irkutsk or to

Petersburg, and though there was something rather appalling in the staring announcement that we were some eight thousand versts from our goal, there was a satisfaction also in noting the impression we had already made upon the figures.

At the little town of Kooibinska we once more took to river travelling, gliding over the winding course of the Uda, a little tributary of the Selenga, which in its turn falls into the Baikal Sea. The Uda had evidently succumbed to the frost at a period anterior to the most recent fall of snow

Not a speck of white disturbed the glassy smoothness of its surface, and so clear had been the water that one could follow the numerous cracks and flaws in the ice downwards for several feet. The horses seemed scarcely to feel the sledge behind them as they galloped, and though the official posting road cut across the banks to avoid the windings of the river, the yemshiks preferred to add several miles unpaid for to their journey in order to obtain the advantage of the smooth ice course. At last, at midnight on the 21st, six days after starting from Stretensk, we completed a stage of thirty-two miles—the longest we had yet accomplished without changing horses—drew up at the post-station at Verkhne Udinsk, and put into dock for repairs.

## CHAPTER XII

## ACROSS THE BAIKAL TO IRKUTSK

Verkhne Udinsk—The Kiakhta road—Mamaichin and Urga—An infant starosta—A day of rest—House sparrows—The starosta in trouble—The Selenga—Freight caravans—Pitfalls—Nearing the Baikal—Kabansk—A little Siberian traveller—Mishikhinsk—Over the Baikal—Icy caves—Ominous fissures—The wreck of a post station—Mock suns—Listvichnaya—A wilderness of freight sledges—The customs station—A two hours' block—An unappetising supper—Rough travelling—A glorious sunrise—English literature in Siberia—Irkutsk

VERKHNE, or Upper, Udinsk, is the second town of the Trans-Baikal Province, its population being slightly in excess of that of Nerchinsk, though scarcely more than a third of the 12,000 which Chita, the capital, boasts. There are just a few stone-built houses in its principal street, and the numbers of Chinese and Buriats who throng its marketplace give it an appearance more Oriental than that of any other important town throughout Siberia. For here we are at the junction of the two great highways of Northern Asia. Southward stretches the road to Kiakhta, Mamaichin, Uiga, the Mongolian capital, and Peking, the metropolis of China. Kiakhta, the great frontier mart of Siberia, is just over a hundred miles from Verkhne Udinsk, and opposite it

on the Chinese side of the boundary line stands Maimaichin, the mournful town where by Chinese law no woman is allowed to live. Merchants may exile themselves for love of gain or with a patriotic desire to extend the commerce of their country, but they may not have their wives and children with them. Another hundred miles and more beyond Kiakhta is the Mongolian capital, Uiga, where one may have the satisfaction of gazing upon a living, breathing god—the Supreme Lama or incarnate Buddha of the Mongols' worship.

When starting from Vladivostok we had promised ourselves the pleasure of a meeting with this divinity, but by the time we had arrived at Verkhne Udinsk we had come to the conclusion that a winter trip across Siberia was a quite sufficient undertaking in itself without superadding excursions into countries of whose resources we could learn but little. The great Siberian postal system stops, of course, at Kiakhta, and beyond there we should have been at the mercy of the Mongols, with an uncertainty of obtaining horses or camels or places to rest in when we required them. We therefore gave up the trip, interesting as a glimpse of the Holy City would have been. We could, however, to some extent compensate ourselves for the loss of the interesting sights that we had surrendered by reflecting on the description given of the city by the Rev James Gilmour of the London Mission. 'Uiga,' Mr Gilmour tells us, 'is the headquarters of the Buddhism of North Mongolia, it is also a stronghold of unblushing sin. Its wickedness does not spring from any one source, but the full tide of the stream

of iniquity that rolls through it is fed by several tributaries which uniting make up the dark flood of its evil. Thus it happens that the encampment of the Supreme Lama of Mongolia is reputed to be the most wicked place in the whole of that wide country.'

On our arrival at the Verkhne Udinsk station its only occupants were four or five little birds and a boy of twelve or thereabouts, who, in response to our demand to see the starosta, replied like a little *grand monarque*, 'The starosta! I am the starosta' We felt dubious, but entrusted him with a commission to find a blacksmith to repair our broken sledge. We were detained some sixteen hours for repairs, and I sorrowfully confess that instead of employing the time in exploring the interesting town at which we had arrived we yielded to tired nature and spent the hours reclining in the guest-room at the post-station, sleeping or reading English novels from the little library we carried with us, and watching our fellow-occupants the sparrows, who seemed not in the least disconcerted by our presence.

At eight in the evening the sledge, with two strong new men runners, stood harnessed at the door, and was soon repacked. Our young starosta had meanwhile somewhat impaired his dignity by allowing himself to be caught frightening his little sister with our fire-arms and tumbling downstairs with our baggage, and when he finally interrupted his duties to fight another little boy in the post-station yard, we set him down as a fraud. However, our arrival and departure were apparently duly noted in the books our *podorozhnaya* was returned to us, and before nine

o'clock we were careering along a roughly made road cut high up in the steep southern bank of the Selenga River.

A new source of trouble and difficulty was now opened to us. We had entered upon the great tea road of Russia. The subjects of the Tsar are, as everybody knows, among the greatest tea-drinkers in the world, almost rivalling the Chinese themselves in their love of the beverage. Every year many millions of pounds of tea are brought overland from China by way of Kiakhta, the bulk of it coming in winter in caravans of sledges to Tomsk, where it awaits the opening of navigation to be conveyed by steamer and railway to the Moscow market. From the time we left Verkhne Udinsk till we arrived at Tomsk, never a day passed that we did not overtake several of these caravans, numbering from thirty or forty to upwards of two hundred sledges, each drawn by a single horse, and laden with tea chests sewn up in raw hide. In the opposite direction, too, come similar caravans laden with European and Siberian merchandise of every description. The allowance of drivers is about one to every ten or twelve sledges, and at night most of these drivers curl up to sleep somewhere amid the merchandise in their sleighs and allow their beasts to meander along the road at their own sweet will.

It is a peculiarly interesting sight to watch a series of these caravans winding along the road in front when the lay of the country enables the traveller to see far ahead, and in the case of the eastward-bound caravans one finds occupation in examining the merchandise which lies exposed in the sledges, and speculating upon the contents of chests



and packages which display no outward sign of the nature of the riches within. But soon one finds that the annoyance and trouble which these caravans cause far outbalance their picturesqueness or their interest. In the middle of the night one is awake from sleep by the crashing of the sledge against one obstacle after another, and the yelling and cursing of yemshiks, and on looking out he finds himself in the midst of a crowd of unguided sleighs which have strayed all across the road, leaving no clear passage. If he escapes without damage to his sledge or his person he is fortunate, for many of the posting conveyances are rather easily upset in spite of their guardian outriggers.

To add to our difficulties in this first stage from Verkhne Udinsk, the narrow road high up in the steep cliff of the Selenga was full of deep pits, in which our sledge half buried itself, and from which it was with difficulty dragged. On our right there was in many places no palisade or protection of any kind between us and the precipitous descent to the river, and in one of our numerous collisions we came perilously near driving the leading sledge of a caravan, together with the horse and attendant driver, sheer down the bank on to the ice, a couple of hundred feet below.

Many continuous weeks of severe frost are required to harden the entire surface of the Baikal Sea, and as a rule January is far advanced before the first sledge crosses over its 'unfathomable' waters. Accordingly as we neared the great lake we anxiously inquired, of travellers eastward bound, as to the course by which they had come. At first their reply was always disappointing. The sea was not yet

safely frozen, and they had been compelled to make the long circuit of its southern shores. But at last, when we were within one day's journey of the sea, we learnt that, though the route over the ice was not yet officially declared open, one or two sledges had just crossed in safety, so that though Government horses could not be taken over, it was possible to procure private horses for the passage.

On the morning of Sunday, January 23, we breakfasted at the little village of Kabansk, a few miles from the border of the lake. We found the guest-room in possession of a crowd of little boys and girls in their night-dresses—the family of the starosta. For the station-master in Siberia is, as a rule, as richly endowed with children as an English curate. The youngsters soon scuttled out at our approach, all except one very fat baby, who was so sociably inclined that we felt disposed to take him home as a specimen of the fauna of Siberia. Soon after leaving the village, we emerged from a thickly wooded winding road into the open country, and saw spreading out before us the broad expanse of ice covering the Baikal Sea, with the high hills on its western shores looming up through the clear air of a perfect Siberian winter's day. For many miles our course lay southwards along the shores of the lake, occasionally cutting across a bay upon the ice, the jagged masses which lay piled around us and the roughness of the pathway under our runners auguring badly for our short sea journey.

Night began to close in before we had arrived at Mishikhinsk, our port of departure across the sea, and as the dangers of a night passage are more than even a Siberian

yemshik cares to brave, we put up for the night at the post-station of Misovska, where we fell in with a little family party of travellers, who put us considerably out of conceit with our whole enterprise. They consisted of a young Russian military officer, his wife, and their child, barely two months old. Like ourselves they journeyed in an open hooded sledge, and they were bound to Khabarovka from the Sea of Azov, whence they had started some five months before. It was a lesson to us. If in future days we felt inclined to plume ourselves upon the voyage we had made, all that would be needed to bring ourselves to a fitting state of humility was to think of the child we met on the Baikal shores, who had commenced the voyage of his life in the midst of this long, snowy journey, and of the mother, a pretty woman, not delicate-looking, but yet of no extraordinary physique, who had braved the rigours of such a journey for herself and her unborn child.

By ten o'clock next morning, we had arrived at Mishikhinsk, and a bargain was soon struck, by which, for ten roubles, we were provided with three horses and a yemshik to take us across the sea. Before starting the yemshik provided himself with a stout pole, some six or eight feet long, which he carefully strapped to the back of the sledge ready for future use.

Along the shores some exceedingly beautiful effects had been produced by the frost. In early winter a quantity of broken ice had collected on the edge of the sea, and the breakers, dashing on this ice, had formed a succession of beautiful miniature stalactite caves, from the roofs of which thousands

of long icicles hung glittering in the sunlight. Occasionally the winding course led over patches of very rough ice, but for the most part the way was smooth enough, though naturally it did not present the glassy surface of a snowless quiet river. Here and there long ridges of jagged ice stretched away high above the level of the lake, but these were insignificant compared with the stupendous icy masses which we had seen piled up in ridges on the Khanka Lake, raised by the fierce winds to which the eastern coast of Asia is exposed.

Frequently an ominous crack could be seen winding along the ice right across our path, and when these were of dangerous width the yemshik would bring his horses to a stand, and arming himself with his pole would approach the edge of the fissure and carefully probe the newly formed ice within it. On one occasion the result was so unsatisfactory that we had to make a long detour from the marked-out course, in order to find a safe place to cross, and twice more the yemshik unharnessed one horse and fastened it behind the sledge, so that in case of the leaders breaking through into the water we should not be left without resources by which to recover them.

It was a curious experience to lie back in our sledge, watching these interesting performances and listening to the moaning of the waves beneath the ice—a strange, somewhat melancholy sound, which always makes itself heard through the rattling of the sledge and the clatter of the horses' hoofs. In the comparatively narrow part of the sea between Mishikhinsk and Listvinichnaya one never

loses sight of the hills which skirt the shores of the lake, but when one is halfway across, the outlines of the hills are sufficiently dim and distant to enable one to fully realise that he is in the midst of a wide sea. To the northward the ice stretches away clear to the horizon, while to the south the dim blue peaks of distant hills can just be discerned apparently closing it in. Formerly, we were told, the ice route lay more to the north, where the sea is broader, and a temporary halfway house was set up on the ice where travellers could obtain refreshments. But at the end of one winter a sudden thaw was accompanied by a violent storm, the house and its occupants disappeared into the sea, and since then the crossing has been made in a single stage.

But though there was no house of call, we drew up somewhere near the spot where it should have been, alighted from our sledge, and strolled about in the snowless expanse of clear ice, which glistened in the bright sunlight. We had not yet had an opportunity of witnessing the glories of the aurora borealis as seen in Northern Asia, nor were we subsequently favoured with this magnificent spectacle, but the interest of our journey across the Baikal was enhanced by the sight of an atmospheric wonder scarcely less interesting, if far less beautiful, than the aurora. Early in the afternoon as the sun sank towards the horizon it appeared to mark the centre of two immense concentric circles of light, the inner brilliant and the outer comparatively faint. On either side of the sun, on the circumference of the inner circle, were two bright mock suns, which seemed

alternately to increase in brilliancy and then grow dim. The strange appearance lasted till the sun sank nearly to the horizon, and our yemshik was evidently awe-struck by it, though whether the phenomenon is of frequent occurrence in this region we did not ascertain.

We had been sledging for a good four hours across the sea, when at length the little port of Listvinichnaya came in sight, and a few minutes later we glided past two little steamers frozen up in the ice and rattled up the bank into the one street of the town, stretching along the side of the hills which rise sheer from the shores of the sea. Crossing the lake we had met and passed numerous long caravans of freight sledges winding along the route marked out on either side by branches of trees stuck in the ice, but even these did not prepare us for the extraordinary scene which burst upon us at the little port. The street itself was thronged with freight sledges, three deep, but in such disorderly array that to clear the block seemed an almost impossible task. Below, on the frozen sea, vast inclosures had been formed by rough hurdles, and in these were thousands of horses attached to similar sledges. Some were tea caravans awaiting their turn to pass the customs barrier situated on the outskirts of the port, but by far the greater number were sledges laden with wares for sale at Verkhne Udinsk fair.

With difficulty we made our way through the crowded street to the post-station, where we were strongly advised to put up for the night. The road from here to Irkutsk was, we were told, exceedingly bad, and the enormous

amount of extra traffic caused by the approaching Verkhne Udinsk fair would render travelling in the now moonless nights almost a matter of impossibility. But we determined to push on to the next station, and we were soon slowly making our way up a steep hill amid freight sledges, till we were brought to a stand by a bar thrown across the road at the customs station.

Our arrival threw the whole customs staff into a state of open-mouthed astonishment. That two Englishmen, with only a rudimentary acquaintance with the Russian language, should endeavour to make their way across Northern Asia in mid-winter, with no special mission and simply from motives of curiosity and a spirit of adventure, appeared to them almost incredible. Two or three of them were able to speak a few words of French and German, and by these we were overwhelmed with questions. 'Where are you?' one of them suddenly asked, turning to my companion, and seeing we were puzzled at the question he repeated, 'Do you know where you are?' My companion opened a Russian chart, and pointing to the position of Listvinichnaya reassured his inquirer's troubled mind. 'Oh, it is all right,' he said to a fellow-officer, 'they know where they are,' and after making a minute search into our baggage they courteously wished us God-speed, and having repacked our sledge we slowly got once more under way. The only objects among our baggage which seemed to arouse their suspicions were a package of safety matches, and a bottle of patent medicine; but even these were ultimately returned to us without any demand

commotion, and found that several of the travellers were preparing to start. Fearful of being left without horses we hastily repacked our sledge, and drove breakfastless away, the last of a procession of three sledges. The leader was a huge kachovka, or hoodless open sledge of rough wood covered with matting. Heavily laden with a large Russian family and their baggage, this clumsy vehicle constantly came to grief in some deep hole in the villanous road, and more than once a horse was unharnessed from the second sledge to help it out of its difficulties. It is, however, a rule of the road in the case of post-sledges that one shall not pass by another which started before it, and, although in some districts the rule is disregarded, here it was so religiously observed that the entire procession was delayed on the occasion of every separate mishap.

The same weary tale of struggles through the midst of endless freight caravans, collisions, deadlocks, and smashes continued, till at length, leaving the post-road, we made our way through a narrow track in a dense wood. Crushing over stumps of trees, bumping against tall trunks, and scraping our way through deep snow, travelling sometimes for miles on one runner and an outrigger, the mode of progression was scarcely an improvement on the road-travelling, but at dawn the marvellous beauty of the scene through which we were passing more than compensated us for the discomforts of our position. It was one of the most splendid of the many gorgeous sunrises which we witnessed during our long sledge journey. Emerging from the wood we came on an undulating



country more sparsely clothed with pines and silver birches. In the clear morning an every minute twig of these delicately formed birches, thickly covered with hoar-frost, could be traced at an immense distance, while the snow lay in thick masses on the pines and fir trees. In the first rays of dawn, before the sun had appeared above the horizon, the whole broad view as we drove along a little ridge of hills presented a vision of unbroken whiteness; but as the splendours of the sunrise spread across the sky, bright changing hues of violet and rose-colour and gold chased each other over the entire landscape, till it presented the appearance of an etherealised fairy transformation scene lighted by coloured fires, such as no theatrical manager has yet succeeded in producing.

By nine o'clock we had arrived at Patonovsk, the last station before Irkutsk. No horses were obtainable till noon, but we spent the time pleasantly enough in endeavouring to carry on a literary conversation in Russian with an intelligent Siberian merchant, who, though unacquainted with any language but his own, appeared to be well versed by means of translations in the writings of the best English authors, including Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, Charles Darwin, Thackeray, Byron, Scott, and Shakespeare. From Patonovsk onwards the road was broad and well kept, and early in the afternoon of the 25th of January we entered the 'Paris of Siberia.'

## CHAPTER XIII

## IRKUTSK TO TOMSK

The Paris of Siberia—The great fire—Ivan Pachaboff—A civilised hotel—A Siberian vapour-bath—A corduroy road—The caravan horse—A lost breakfast—Tulunovsk—Nizhni Udinsk—Siberian roads—Damages and repairs—Sledge races—Krasnoyarsk—A kindly Englishman—Western Siberia—A train of convicts—Sleeping men's souls—An unexpected visitor—The worst road on record—Tomsk

THE PARIS of Siberia! There was nothing very strikingly Parisian about the miles of loghouses through which we passed in our tattered sledge before we reached the centre of Irkutsk. The houses, it is true, were comparatively sound and trim, the outer roofs did not show great gaping holes and rotting planks as did so many of the huts in the villages through which we had daily passed, and here and there among them was a two or three floored residence, its eaves and window-frames elaborately ornamented with carving, and signs of civilisation in the shapes of blinds and curtains discernible through its double windows. As we drew near to the heart of the town, tokens of wealth and luxury grew more numerous: some of the houses were quite imposing structures. Still, all were of wood, and we began to think the pictures which had been drawn for our

edification by patriotic Siberians—for, strange as it may appear, such creatures do exist—must have been highly over-coloured. Suddenly, however, we turned a corner and found ourselves in the midst of a scene of civilisation such as we had not witnessed since setting foot on Russian soil. Lofty, well-built houses of brick and stone skirted the broad road, and behind the plate-glass windows of fine shops were exposed goods of every kind, almost as rich and as diversified as one may see in any great city of Western Europe. Sledges

with beautiful well-groomed horses and glittering harness were galloping along the road, and ladies paced the sidewalks dressed in furs of designs which showed that



Boys skating on  
sidewalk  
Irkutsk

Parisian fashions are not neglected by the mantle-makers of Irkutsk.

Soon we turned a corner and pulled up in the courtyard of the Russian hotel. It was a large, though not a very comfortable or well-provided hostelry, but its accommodation was palatial compared with that to which we had for weeks been accustomed, and though we subsequently discovered that Irkutsk boasts in the 'Moscow' an hotel which would do little discredit to Paris or London, we did

not trouble to shift our quarters. Our couches were, it is true, unencumbered with any other bed-clothing than a rug or two, but sheets were a comfort we had learned to do without, and as we had still some thousands of miles of the roughest travelling before us, perhaps on the whole it was well not to encumber ourselves with luxuries.

Having once more put our sledge into dock for repairs, and having transformed ourselves from the travel-stained unkempt savages of the road into comparatively civilised beings, we sallied forth from the hotel, hailed an *izvoshtchik*, chose one of the dozen sledges which came scampering up to us from all directions, and drove through the town in search of Mr. Barentzen, a Danish gentleman in the service of the Russian Telegraphs, to whom we brought letters of recommendation, and under whose kindly guidance we subsequently inspected some of the architectural beauties and places of interest in the town.

There were few if any easily recognisable traces to be seen of the great fire which ravaged Irkutsk some seven years before our visit, and from the effects of which it has by no means yet recovered. In that fire, which broke out on the 7th of July, 1879, 3,600 houses were consumed, as well as ten churches, five bazaars, the great meat market, and a host of public buildings. Of its thirty-four thousand inhabitants, twenty thousand were rendered homeless, and the damage has been estimated at three million roubles. Dr. Henry Lansdell was at that time engaged upon his tract and Bible distributing mission among the prisoners, exiles, and peasants of Siberia; and good or evil fortune

brought him to Irkutsk on the very eve of this great fire. He had scarcely settled down in his hotel before he was compelled to move before the flames, and, having witnessed the conflagration from start to finish, he has been able to place on record a reliable account of it. In the principal street still stands the little Byzantine chapel whose escape from the flames—very naturally to be accounted for by the fact that the surrounding houses were of brick—is still regarded as a miracle.

From the broad river Angara, on the right bank of which it stands, the city presents a striking appearance. Like all Russian and Siberian towns of any size, it is remarkably well provided with churches, the spires and pointed domes of which, however ugly on a near approach, render the distant view of the city picturesque and pleasing. Though the mean temperature of Irkutsk is below freezing point, and at the time of our visit—in the last week of January—the thermometer registered always from twenty to thirty degrees below zero, the town stands on just about the same line of latitude as Birmingham. It is situated at a bend of the Angara, where that river is joined by a little tributary called the Usta Kofka, nearly opposite the mouth of another little tributary, the Irkut, from which the city takes its name. It dates its origin from 1652, when a Cossack chief named Ivan Pachaboff erected a block-house at the junction of the Irkut and the Angara. Around Pachaboff's wooden fort the fishermen and merchants, for the sake of its protection, raised their houses, and in thirty years the settlement had become of sufficient importance to

be dignified with the name of a town. In 1698 the inhabitants successfully repulsed an attack by Buriats, and a coat of arms was granted to the township. It became the seat of government of Eastern Siberia in 1783, in which year it was ravaged by a fire nearly as disastrous as that of 1879. The inhabitants do not seem to have taken the lesson of these terrible fires very seriously to heart, for although the main street and two or three leading from it are now built of bricks or stone, all the rest of the houses, with the exception of a few wealthy merchants' residences, have been rebuilt of wood. Great fires are not the only visitations which the people of Irkutsk have to fear. The locality is also very subject to earthquakes. The town has now a population of some 40,000, of whom about two-thirds are said to be Polish exiles or their descendants.

Irkutsk boasts a museum, a theatre, technical and military schools and colleges, an institute for the daughters of noblemen, and a free school of arts founded by a rich merchant. It has a very active Geographical Society, which regularly publishes its proceedings; and altogether it is the intellectual centre of Siberia, owing its ascendancy in this respect perhaps to its large admixture of Polish blood. Citizens festively inclined resort in summer to a little public garden with a café amidst its trees; but at the time of our visit this centre of mild dissipation was of course deserted. At the Moscow Hotel, however, we found a goodly number of officers in uniform and merchants making merry and exercising themselves at billiards. In the spacious and excellently appointed dining-room we were served with an

admirable little *dîner à la carte*, and in every respect we found that the praises which had been bestowed upon the hotel were thoroughly deserved

One semi-public institution which we visited may perhaps be worth a detailed description—the Russian bath-house. It was only one of half a dozen or a dozen similar establishments in the Eastern Siberian capital, but it was recommended to us as decidedly the best of them. Every Siberian town of any size, as well as every Russian town, has its public vapour-bath. It consists generally of two separate divisions—one embracing a general bath to which, for a few kopeks apiece, a score or more of bathers may obtain admittance and steam themselves together, and the other divided into separate compartments in which, on payment of a considerably higher but still very moderate fee, privacy may be had. My first experience of the Russian bath had been obtained at Vladivostok. This bath, which I visited with a Russian friend, appeared to be well patronised, for we were kept waiting a considerable time in an almost unfurnished room amid quite a little crowd of men and women before our turn came round. Then we were shown into a gloomy little cell with rather more than a suspicion of griminess about it, and only a very few degrees cooler than the bath itself. I was glad to disarray myself as speedily as possible, and then entering the bath itself, I found myself in a rather larger and hotter, but no less gloomy cell, in the centre of which was a brick stove, while on one side were wooden benches rising like steps to within a few feet of the ceiling, and on the other a rough kind of lavatory, supplied with

large wooden basins into which one could ladle hot or cold water, the former from a huge receptacle upon the stove. The air was already somewhat thick with steam, which, rising to the ceiling, increased the temperature very perceptibly for each step one mounted of the ascending flight of benches, but to increase the effect my companion dashed a few bowls of water on the stove, and we were at once enveloped in clouds of hot white vapour. Stretching ourselves out on the benches, we reclined at ease until we felt sufficiently boiled, and then, having performed for ourselves the duties of the shampooer in a Turkish bath, we completed the operation by dashing over each other quantities of water of ever-descending degrees of temperature from the wooden bowls. The dressing-room had by this time got so hot, especially near its low ceiling, that we had to sit upon the ground while putting on our clothes, and even a refreshing draught of *kvass*—a pleasant, mild fermented beverage made from black bread—was not thoroughly effectual in restoring us to our normal temperature.

The Irkutsk bath was of course far more luxurious than this, though even that fell far behind the Petersburg or Moscow vapour-bath, or a London 'Turk'. At Irkutsk we were ushered first into a spacious hall, at one end of which was a refreshment bar, while tables here and there were well supplied with illustrated and other newspapers published in the capital and principal towns of European Russia. The dressing-rooms were furnished with cushioned couches, over which white sheets were spread, and in the bath itself, taps supplied with water, hot and cold, took the places of the



primitive tubs and ladles of the Vladivostok bath. But in all other respects the Irkutsk bath was very similar to that at the port. The vapour-bath itself was scarcely better appointed or free from the aspect of dinginess and grime, and the dressing-room was so intensely hot that the luxury of lying at one's ease and slowly cooling down was not to be enjoyed, and consequently the bath could not be scientifically finished off. However, I suffered no ill effects from the sudden change of temperature to the intense cold out of doors.

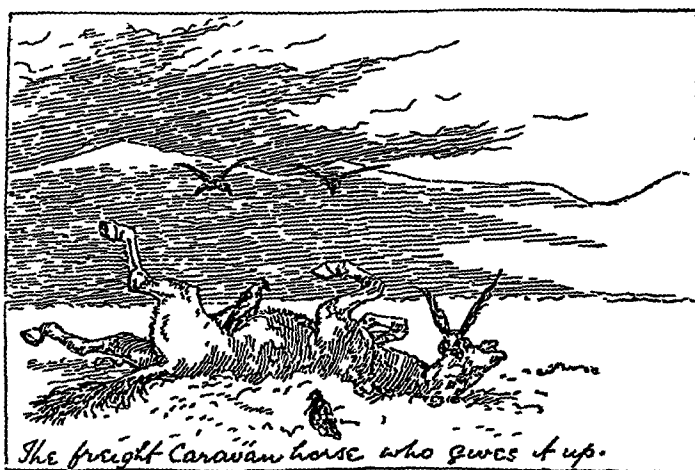
Four days we spent in the capital, resting and sight-seeing, and then, at midday on January 29, we repacked our renovated sledge, crossed the broad river, and galloped away in the direction of Krasnoyarsk, rattling along over a perfect corduroy road—not manufactured artificially like those of America by transverse rows of tree-trunks, but formed naturally by the hoofs of thousands upon thousands of freight-sledge horses. Each horse in each long caravan treads so closely in the footsteps of its leader that continuous parallel lines of deep troughs are formed across the road from side to side, perfectly straight and equidistant, and the ridges between these troughs are so firmly solidified by the succession of heavy sledges passing over them, that no American wood-pole road could by any possibility so well deserve the name of 'corduroy'.

Travelling now through a hilly and well-wooded country, we came at intervals upon little towns picturesquely situated at the feet of steep cliffs, down which we somewhat perilously slid, feeling much the need of the grapnel-like brakes trailing behind and catching in the ice with which some of the

better class of private sledges were provided. We rarely had to climb, for the country here forms a succession of terraces descending from east to west, and the towns are for the most part built under the shelter of the cliffs thus formed. Almost every hour we passed through some small village, many of them even more dilapidated than those of the eastern provinces. The Siberian log-hut is always built with double roofs as well as double windows, and the outer roof, formed of wooden planks, is frequently allowed to fall into such a state of disrepair, that, to the inexperienced eye, a village of the poorer sort seems to contain no single house which could by any possibility be habitable in so severe a climate. The houses too, especially in the province of Irkutsk, lean in every direction out of the perpendicular, though whether this is due to faults of the builders or to the earthquakes to which the locality is very subject, we did not ascertain.

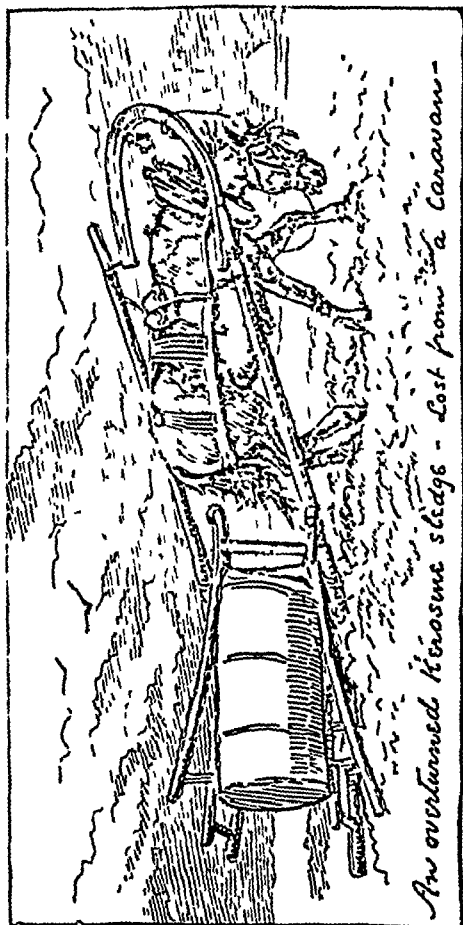
Daily we continued to meet and pass long caravans of tea and kerosene and Western produce, and frequently our horses, suddenly shying and swerving from the path with terror in their eyes, would call our attention to the stiff frozen corpse of some poor Rosinante, with a flock of carrion crows hovering around it. The life of the caravan horse is anything but a happy one. Day and night, day and night, sleeping and waking, he plods on with scarcely ever a rest. At the back of the sledge in front of him is a wooden bowl, into which the yemshik occasionally throws some grain or a little snow with which the poor beast can cool its parched mouth, and when at length he falls exhausted, he is cut loose to die,

while one of his wretched fellows has to do double duty for a time. Once we came up behind a caravan and passed a horse, from the yet unfrozen, raw, bleeding, steaming flesh of which the hide had just been removed entire, and it was impossible to repress a horrible suspicion that the two men who were hurrying after the sledges with the skin had begun their bloody work before the animal was fairly dead, lest the quick-acting frost should interfere with their labours.



Early in the morning of the second day after leaving Irkutsk we were wakened by the sudden stopping of the sledge and the loud halloaing of our yemshik, and on looking around us a curious scene met our eyes. The dawn was breaking, and we were in the midst of a wide plain, the tips of the straggly grass just visible above the snow. Close in front of us was a little sledge, to which was lashed a large barrel of kerosene. Through some accident the sledge

had got tipped over on its side, and in its struggles to right itself the horse had shaken the duga from its place and got one shaft between its legs. It had then yielded to its fate,



*An overturned kiasma sledge - Lost from a caravan -*

and, with head hung down, the only living thing in sight, it looked the very picture of desolation. In the dim morning light we could see no sign of the caravan from the ranks of which it had fallen out, doubtless while the yemshiks were asleep, but our driver's eyes were, perhaps, more accustomed to the light than ours. To us his halloaing seemed a vain and purposeless proceeding, but it proved otherwise, for after some few minutes it was echoed by an answering shout, and a little later

a peasant came in sight, and with profuse thanks took charge of the lost sledge and horse.

Half an hour later we reached a gateway marking the boundary of a township, and the yemshik forfeited his

'na vodka' and earned a dressing down by diving us full pelt against a gate-post and smashing an outrigger into two. At the next station the starosta spliced the broken pole with rope, and we proceeded with little delay but with tempers scarcely sweetened. For we had brought with us from Irkutsk some small cured fish like little bloaters, and while we superintended the mending of the sledge, the starosta's big dog had made off with our breakfast as it was comfortably gilling at the guest-room stove. It was specially annoying because it was rarely we were favoured with so good a chance of exercising our culinary art, and the Siberian peasant cannot be persuaded by any manner of means that a smoked fish needs cooking. Then to add to our troubles a fine large ham that we elected to fall back upon proved to be frozen so hard that nothing less than a chopper would make the smallest impression on it, and nothing fit to eat could be obtained at the station.

But our troubles of this kind were very nearly ended. At many stations cabbage soup or other homely but appetising fare was kept in readiness for the coming traveller, and almost before we had time to doff our furs it was brought smoking hot into the guest-room. Our bag of frozen food still contained some remnants of the mighty joint of beef bestowed upon us by Mrs Paulsen at Blagovestchensk some four or five weeks before, as well as other viands more recently procured, but we seldom found it necessary to have recourse to this. At the villages white bread was, it is true, still an unknown luxury, but our arrival at the post-station of a town of any size was the signal for the

appearance of half a dozen hawkers bearing trays of biscuits, cake, and bread, from which we could, without difficulty, replenish our store. Two days out from Irkutsk we reached the little town of Tulunovsk, and, exploring the place while waiting for our horses, my national vanity was gratified by a token at a general shop that British manufactures had penetrated even here, for hanging in the window was a fine specimen of coloured lithography announcing that Paisley threads could be obtained within. Subsequently in Western Siberia we came frequently across similar advertisements bearing the names of more than one firm of Paisley manufacturers, as well as others explaining the virtues of the implements of husbandry imported by the agents of the great agricultural machinery manufacturers of Bedford and Ipswich.

At half-past seven on the morning of February 1 we reached the pretty little town of Nizhni—or Lower—Udinsk, called after quite another Uda from that on which Verkhne, or Upper, Udinsk stands. The Western Uda is a tributary of the great Yenisei, and thus its waters find their way to Arctic regions, the Eastern falls into the Selenga, by far the largest of the rivers which feed the Baikal Sea. M. Edmond Cotteau, who passed through Nizhni Udinsk in the early summer, tells us that the waters of the Uda flow clear and rapid over polished and rounded pebbles, which form a marvellous natural collection of specimens of granite, porphyry, and marbles of all colours, but at the time of our brief visit these beauties were, of course, hidden by the ice.

Breakfast despatched, we resumed our journey without remaining to explore the town. The horses in this district were large and strong, and the yemshiks well earned their drink-money. Travelling was fairly fast, despite the wretched condition of the roads. Between Irkutsk and Tomsk, where probably there is more road traffic than in all the rest of Siberia put together, we found the worst roads anywhere. At night all attempts to sleep were often rendered futile by the crashing and bumping and swaying of the sledges, and by the yelling of the yemshiks as they lashed up the horses into a supreme effort to drag the sledge from some deep hole extending right across the road, in which it was half buried, and more than once in the middle of the night we had to rouse ourselves from broken slumbers and relieve the sledge of our weight before the struggling beasts could succeed in their efforts.

In many places where the nature of the country would permit it, a driver would desert the main road and make a path for himself through the deep untrodden snow over grassy plains, and others, following in his track, would gradually beat out a path, rough and uncultured, but still preferable to the road itself, cut up as it was and *corduroyed* by countless caravans of freight-sledges. Over these fearful roads we tore often at a mad gallop. In the second stage from Nizhni Udinsk our middle horse was harnessed so close in that at every bound he sent his hind hoofs crushing against the front of the sledge, and on alighting at the village post-station of Kamishtchetskaya we were more annoyed than surprised to find a plank entirely kicked away,

our precious ham hanging out, and the hold in which were stowed our bag of frozen food and other necessaries of the journey creak full of dirty snow kicked up by the horses' hoofs. A new piece of plank was soon nailed in, and on we went again, travelling neck and neck with two Russian merchants in a huge kachovka.

The rule against passing a post-sledge going in the same direction on the road appeared to be ignored in this part of the journey, and we had many an exciting race with our friends. Early on the morning of February 2 the two sledges drew up almost at the same moment at the door of a post-station bearing the euphonious name of Polovino-Cheremkhovskaya. The kachovka got off again with a good ten minutes' start of us, but we fortunately obtained the services of a dashing young yemshik, a youth scarcely emerged from boyhood, who started off with a stern determination to reach the next station first or destroy us all in the attempt. Shortly after starting we galloped over the brow of a hill and obtained a fine view of a broad valley spreading out before us. Through the valley and up the narrow roadway on the steep hillside, a long procession of freight-sledges was winding slowly towards us, and right into the midst of these our reckless young driver plunged, tearing down the hill at a mad gallop, completely overturning several of the sledges, and often coming within an ace of upsetting us as well. But with all its faults ours was a steady, well-balanced sledge, and though after some tremendous crash which seemed likely to burst in the side of the vehicle we sometimes remained poised for several seconds



in unstable equilibrium on one runner and the point of an outrigger, we always finally settled down right side upwards. How the yemshik managed to maintain his seat upon the box through this manoeuvre was a mystery to us, but he stuck on, and in a few minutes we had left the hill and the caravan and our friends in the kachovka far behind.

But when we reached the next station, in a little village known as Khochinskaya, we were not greatly surprised to find half a dozen of the ribs which kept the body of the sledge together cracked in two. To expect the sledge to hang together for another stage seemed hopeless, and we were looking around in search of a vehicle to take its place, when our friends the Russian merchants arrived and came to our assistance. They expressed a much more hopeful opinion of the condition of our travelling home. Under their direction several yards of rope were twisted, coiled, and netted round the sledge, and our hopes of bringing our old gipsy-van with us to the railway terminus were raised again.

But it is the by-ways made to avoid the corduroy roads that afford the finest opportunities for racing. The roads themselves are scarcely wide enough for the purpose, but if the leading sledge takes to the by-ways, the yemshik behind gallops his horses along the rough high-road in the hope of arriving first at the spot where the two roads meet. Then for the next few minutes the travellers experience a series of sensations more exhilarating than luxurious. Lashing furiously at his horses, and lavishing upon them promiscuously the vilest oaths and the tenderest terms of endearment, the driver sends his team spinning along at the

top of their speed, jumping deep holes and sending the sledge crashing over every obstacle in its way. On one occasion we had a particularly exciting contest of this kind, for as we neared the junction of the two roads it became apparent that it would be a neck and neck race. And here our heavy and well-balanced sledge stood us in good stead, for when the crash came it was the other sledge that overturned, and they were our rivals and not ourselves who were hauled out into the snow with their baggage on the top of them. But they bore us no ill-will. We were out of sight before they had repacked their sledge and started after us, but when they caught us up while discussing a meal at the next station-house, they laughed heartily at their mishap and congratulated us on our victory.

Soon after midnight on February 2, we passed through the little town of Kansk, and at daylight on the 4th, five days and eighteen hours after leaving Irkutsk, we pulled up at Krasnoyarsk, having kept up an average of 189 versts, or 126 miles, a day. We had been warned by friends that the hotels of Krasnoyarsk were anything but good, and that very decent accommodation could be had at the post-station. For in the towns of Western Siberia the post-stations also serve the purpose of hotels. In the common guest-room they are compelled by the regulations to give accommodation free to travellers, but in addition they have private rooms, the use of which the guests may obtain on payment of a very moderate sum. The accommodation was certainly not luxurious, but it was infinitely better than that of some Siberian hotels at which we had stayed, and on the morn-

ing of our arrival we slept very comfortably till midday, when we once more donned the garb and assumed the aspect of civilisation and went into the town in search of Dr Peacock, Director of the Krasnoyarsk Hospital, and the son of an Englishman

As Irkutsk is known as the Paris of Siberia, so Krasnoyarsk, the City of the Red Cliffs, is called its Athens. Of all the great towns situated on the Northern Asian highway it is certainly the most picturesquely situated. The ruddy-brown cliffs of the Yenesei and the Kacha rivers, at the confluence of which it is built, rise to a considerable height, rocky and well wooded in parts. It is in the midst of a hilly country, and even in its stern winter aspect there was something about it very pleasant and inviting. Unfortunately, like Irkutsk, it has suffered in recent years from a most disastrous fire. It was on the night of April 17, 1881, that this great conflagration began. Within four hours 340 houses were destroyed, and when the fire had burnt itself out, the only buildings remaining standing within an area of some 250 acres were two or three churches, which, built in the midst of wide open spaces, had escaped with little damage. The loss was estimated at from six to eight million roubles, but in the half-dozen years which had passed since the disaster, almost every trace of it had disappeared.

Two days we rested in Krasnoyarsk, revelling in the hospitality of the genial Anglo-German Russian doctor and his wife. Of English blood on his father's side, and German on his mother's, Dr Peacock has so fitted himself to his

surroundings that he is an excellent Russian, having almost no acquaintance with the language of his fathers. But in his fine physique as well as in his noble work at the hospital, he does honour to his English parentage, which shows itself too in his ardent love for sport, and the cordial welcome which he is always ready to extend to any chance Englishman who may pass through Krasnoyarsk. Insular prejudice induced my companion and myself, I am afraid, to submit to rather than return the worthy doctor's embrace when he kissed us on the lips at parting; but if the manner of the leave-taking was a trifle 'un-English' its kindness and heartiness were ample compensation.

Our station-house looked out upon a wide open space, in the centre of which stood the cathedral of the see of Yeneseisk, differing in little but its size from the churches of Byzantine architecture which we now passed at every town. When we rose on the Sabbath morning, clouds of white smoke were rising from every part of its roof; and my first impression was that the town was threatened with another conflagration. A little reflection and observation convinced me, however, that the smoke was issuing from hidden chimneys leading from the many stoves which would be necessary to raise the great building to a comfortable heat in such a climate. Experience had taught us that the exterior is generally by far the best part of a Siberian church, so we did not trouble to examine the interior of the cathedral.

At ten o'clock on Sunday morning, February 10, we were once more packed in our sledge, and twenty-two hours

later, we were breakfasting at the little town of Achinsk, only a few miles within the boundary line of East Siberia. Henceforth our travelling expenses were to be reduced by half. In Eastern Siberia the Government rate is three kopeks per verst per horse, in the West it is only one kopek and a half. The boundary line runs somewhere about halfway between the two stations of Bieloyarskaya on the east, and Krasnorechinskaya on the west. Travelling eastward, one gets at Bieloyarskaya eastern horses, and has consequently to pay, for the stage of seventeen versts, just double the price legally demanded for the journey in the opposite direction.

As we approached the city of Tomsk, the largest and most important town in Western Siberia, the passenger traffic became greatly increased. Officers and merchants in post-sledges met us every few miles, troops of Cossack soldiers on the march, with their families in sledges behind, several times enlivened the journey, and twice or thrice a more painful interest was excited by a long train of convicts, emerging from some dismal *étape*, or prison resting place, in the early morning, or marching dejectedly along the road, the sickly following with the women in rough open sledges behind. The largest train we met, near Achinsk, must have numbered fully a hundred persons, guarded by only some half a dozen soldiers. They appeared to be warmly clad in sheepskin shubas, and, gaze at them curiously as we would, it was difficult to gather from these passing glimpses any vivid impression as to the degree of the long sufferings they endured. The Russian Government is

understood to have abolished the system of sending trains of convicts to Siberia during the winter, but that the work of distributing the exiles among the prisons of Asiatic Russia goes on to a considerable extent during the season of snow and ice is a fact for which I can certainly vouch.

Travellers have often remarked on the singular unwillingness of the Russians to wake a sleeping man. Dr. Lansdell, the author of 'Through Siberia,' was informed by an Anglo-Russian lady that she had frequently been told, on asking for a servant, that he was asleep and could not be waked, because 'a sleeping man's soul was before his God.' A rather remarkable instance of this Russian superstition occurred to us at a post-station some sixty or seventy miles before we reached Tomsk. It was the dead of night when we arrived, and all the horses were out. It would have been difficult to obtain private horses at that hour, and we decided to rest where we were till the dawn. To avoid unpacking, and as a slight safeguard against pilfering, I curled up in the sledge, while my companion slept on the station-house floor. In the morning we learnt from the station-master that a friend had inquired after us in the night, and left a note for us. He proved to be a young Teutonic Russian telegraphist named Doring, a native of Riga, whose acquaintance we had made at Khabarovka. We had heard there of his approaching departure for his native town, and a suggestion had been made that we should travel together, but the uncertainty of the date of his leaving had decided us to forego the advantage of his

companionship. He had left Khabarovka five days later than ourselves, and for upwards of three thousand miles, travelling in company with a Russian merchant bound for Moscow, he had pursued us along the great Siberian highway, everywhere tracing our progress by the post-station records. It was a source of congratulation to us subsequently to learn that, despite the merchant's anxiety to reach Moscow at the earliest possible date, and despite the fact that M. Doing, as a Government official, was armed with a *Crown podorozhnaya*, they had had extreme difficulty in catching us, and that it was only our comparatively long stays at Blagovestchensk and Irkutsk that had enabled them to succeed. At last, however, they had come up with us. It would have been a source of no little pleasure to us to meet in that unlikely spot with a familiar face, and M. Doing was, I believe, equally desirous of a meeting with us, with a view to arranging for our continuing the journey from Tomsk together. But we were asleep, and, accustomed though we were to brief watches in the night, he would not wake us. At Tomsk, however, chance brought us to the same hotel, and we were subsequently indebted to M. Doing, with whom we travelled together to Moscow, for many useful wrinkles in regard to Siberian and Russian travelling, and for an interesting insight into some phases of Russian peasant life, of which, without his assistance, we should have seen little or nothing.

Mr. George Kennan, who during his latest visit to Siberia made the journey between Tomsk and Krasnoyarsk some eighteen months before us, speaks of the road between

Achinsk and the latter town as the worst he had ever seen in his life. 'It was,' he says, 'some satisfaction to learn

at Ustanofskaya (fourteen miles from Krasnoyarsk) that General Ignatief, the newly appointed Governor-General of Eastern Siberia, who passed over the road between Achinsk and Krasnoyarsk a few days before us, was so exasperated by its condition that he ordered the immediate arrest of the contractor who had undertaken to keep it in repair, and directed that he be held in prison to await an investigation. Mr Frost and I agreed that it was a proper case for the exercise of despotic power. I can heartily sympathise with Mr. Kennan's feelings. Allowing for the difference in the seasons, which was greatly in our favour, it was yet evident that this



*What a Siberian calls a Floka Soroga*

piece of road had been immensely improved since Mr Ken-



nan passed over it, and the amelioration may fairly be attributed to the energetic action of General Ignatieff. But we had grave reason to regret that the Governor-General of Western Siberia had not imitated so excellent an example. The nearer we got to Tomsk the worse became the road, till in the last stage of twenty miles the climax was reached. The whole journey was one terrible jolting in and out of deep pits from which the tired beasts could scarcely drag the sledge. Our utmost rate of progress was less than four miles an hour, and before half the stage was accomplished the horses were utterly unable to proceed. Fortunately we were able to procure a fresh team, and at nine o'clock in the evening we arrived, wearied out, at the door of the Europa Hotel at Tomsk.

## CHAPTER XIV

## TOMSK TO TIUMEN

The boundary of steam communication—Companions and a change of route—Omsk—Siberian music—Off again—A meagre dinner—A punn—Private horses and private post-stations—In the family bedrooms—Homespun—Cheap bread—Beggars—Tiukalinsk—Nearing the railway—Quick travelling—Tiumen

At last we had reached the real boundary of the civilisation of the West. Had it been summer we should now have been at the end of our journey by road. Except in the season of ice and snow a regular line of steamers navigates the waters of the Obi, the Irtysh, and the Tura, from Tomsk to Tiumen, whence travellers can proceed by rail to Perm, and thence again by steamer down the Kama and up the Volga to Nizhni Novgorod, where they are within four days' journey of London.

We, however, had still nearly two thousand miles of sledging before us, and finding ourselves in by far the most comfortable hotel we had yet encountered in Siberia, we proposed to rest a few days, recruit ourselves, and inspect the sights of Tomsk. But just as we were preparing to sleep we received a visit from Mr. Doring, our telegraphist friend from Khabarovka, and we had soon agreed to an alteration

of our plans. The high road runs southward from Tomsk to the city of Omsk, the seat of government of the Steppe Provinces, and thence turns north again to Trumen. This was the route by which we intended to go, making a halt at Omsk, but Mr. Doering had another plan to propose. He and his merchant fellow-traveller intended starting within thirty-six hours, following the main road to Elanskaya (some 290 miles), then striking straight for Tiukalinsk and leaving Omsk away to the south. The saving in distance was only some forty or fifty miles, and we should miss seeing Omsk, but we were told that the loss in this regard would not be great.

'If I were asked to characterise Omsk in a few words,' says Mr. Kennan, 'I should describe it as a city of 30,000 inhabitants, in which the largest building is a military academy, and the most picturesque building a police station, in which there is neither a newspaper nor a public library, and in which one half of the population wears the Tsar's uniform and makes a business of governing the other half.' This terse description of Omsk had not been written at the time of our visit to Tomsk, and even had it been in our hands it would probably not have altered our decision. Siberian travel, with all its features of interest, was, it must be confessed, beginning to pall on us a little, and we were not indisposed to shorten our journey, even at the cost of missing Omsk. The latter part of Mr. Kennan's description would apply admirably to more than one town in Eastern Siberia through which we had passed, and the advantage of the companionship of two experienced Siberian travellers

would far more than compensate us for the lost view of the picturesque police station

Our stay at Tomsk was thus shortened to thirty-six hours, the greater part of which was usefully employed in sleep. Tomsk is, next to Irkutsk, the largest and most important town in all Siberia. Mr. Kennan, who has had excellent opportunities for judging, declares it to be in point of intelligence and prosperity the first, but in point of interest it falls below some of the smaller Siberian towns, in that it is much more European. It has in its yet unopened university a splendid public building, its principal streets are wide, clean, and cheerful, flanked with brick-built houses and prosperous-looking shops. At its telegraph station I encountered an English-speaking Russian of Teutonic blood who had paid a visit to Portsmouth as a prisoner during the Crimean war, but who showed the best of good will towards the nation of his captors. We formed quite a pleasant little dinner party that day in the spacious saloon of the Europa Hotel, though the harmony of the gathering was rather disturbed than promoted by the playing of a huge orchestra of which the landlord was excessively proud. He had imported it at enormous expense, and it certainly poured forth an apparently unlimited number of operatic and other airs with an almost deafening volume of sound. This was not the only instrument of the kind—though it was by far the costliest—that we saw in a Siberian hotel. It would seem that the Siberians' love of music is greater than their skill as instrumentalists. During our little dinner at the Europa I was incautious

enough to express a desire to hear the mighty music-box, and the landlord, in his desire to please, set a servant to work grinding out music with a persistency which only a protest, more emphatic than polite, from my companion could break down.

At a little after eleven o'clock on Friday morning, the 11th of February, we started away on our last stage of Siberian sledging, Mr. Doing and his merchant friend, Mr. Piankoff, leading the way, and Ulen and I in our old travel-beaten povoska bringing up the rear. Mr. Piankoff was getting anxious to be at his journey's end, and rests for meals were short. We had taken the precaution to make a hearty meal before leaving Tomsk, but when eight hours later we drew up at the post-station house of Pioskokova and ordered out the samovar we were a little disappointed to find that our Russian friend's notion of dinner was a raw red herring and bread, even though there was vodka and Benedictine in abundance to wash it down.

The next day a purga began—not so fierce as that which raged on the Pacific coast just before we started on our long sledge journey, not wild enough to prevent us from continuing on our way, but sufficiently strong to compel us to cover in the front of our sledge with a curtain of felt, and to half smother us then with the snow which found its way in between the crevices. For the greater part of a week, the snow and wind scarcely ever ceased. For hundreds of miles we were compelled to box ourselves in and satisfy ourselves with only an occasional glimpse of the

country through which we were passing. The loss in this respect was not, however, very great. For a considerable part of the distance we were passing over a vast steppe, the monotony of which was only broken here and there by innumerable windmills. We had got now into a country of fairly well-kept roads, but the deep, newly fallen, and as yet almost untrodden snow which covered the tracks, rendered it difficult to keep up a high rate of speed. Our Russian friends had great advantages over us in the shape of a lighter sledge, less luggage, and a Crown *podorozhnaya*, and our knowledge of Russian invective was taxed to the uttermost to prevent our being left behind. Where the snow was deep or the road was bad, we usually put in a demand for an extra horse, and frequently got it without extra payment.

Often as we neared a post-station the *yemshuk* would turn to us and ask if we wished to be taken to the Government post-station, or to a private owner of horses; and at length on reaching the town of Kamishyeva, we received at the post-station a note from Mr. Doring, informing us that he and his companion were '*chez un volni*,' which being interpreted signified that they were at the house of one of the numerous rivals of the Government in the posting business. The cost of Government posting in Western Siberia is, as I have explained, anything but extravagant. Two persons with a reasonable amount of baggage require but a pair of horses, and are not compelled to pay for more, even if the state of the road requires a third. For two fellow-travellers the cost is therefore scarcely more than a farthing a mile for

each of them, this including the hire of horses, the service of drivers, and the use of post-stations. Yet, so cheap are horses here, and so miserably poor are the inhabitants, that there is quite a brisk competition among the peasants for the privilege of carrying travellers at this low rate, or for even less if one has a turn for bargaining, and with better horses than the Government stations generally provide. Between Tomsk and Tiumen—and even farther east than Tomsk—every town and village has its private posting houses. At these no *podorozhnaya* is asked for, the tax of a kopek per verst which the Government charges for these permits may be saved, and the traveller may be certain of private horses never failing him.

The houses are poor, it is true, but they afford to the 'tourist' in search of knowledge a better glimpse into peasant life in Siberia than can generally be obtained at Government post-stations. 'Chez un volni' there is often no room set apart for travellers and customers. Often the house consists of but two rooms, one occupied by the proprietor and the whole of his family, and the other by *yemshiks*. From Kamisheva to Tiumen, a distance of nearly five hundred miles, we travelled almost entirely with horses from these private stations. Arriving at all hours of the night, we were frequently shown into the family bedroom to wait till the horses were harnessed. Sometimes a bevy of damsels would rise from the floor or from beds, and, wrapping their scanty bed-covering around them, would scuttle off with maiden bashfulness, but more frequently they would refuse to be disturbed in the midst of their night's repose.

The rooms, squalid and poor as they were, showed a much nearer approach to Western comfort than those in the wild regions of the Far Eastern provinces. In many cases large wooden four-posters filled the corners of the room, and thick hanging curtains shielded the sleepers from the prying gaze of curious passengers. Often, however, these devices of modesty were entirely wanting.

In these rooms, too, while the family were yet asleep, we drank our tea in the early morning; and here, with the household duties going on around us, we took our meals by day. Often, it must be confessed, there was a stuffiness about the apartment which did not conduce to strengthen the appetite, and sometimes 'stuffiness' was a term hardly sufficiently strong to meet the case.

Spinning was prominent among the domestic duties. At several of the houses, the wife or one of the daughters was engaged in producing home-spun linen, which, we were told, commands a ready sale in quite distant parts of Russia. We had seldom to have recourse to our supply of frozen viands. Our travelling companions allowed us only one square meal a day, and sometimes our merchant friend rebelled at even that, and proposed to make the *zakouska* suffice—the piece of raw dried fish or some other delicacy of that nature taken to the accompaniment of a glass or two of vodka. The meals to be had at the houses were, it is true, not always of the best, but good substantial *shtchee* could generally be obtained. Despite the signs of greater comfort in the houses, the people are far poorer than in the Eastern provinces. Living appeared to be exceedingly



As we neared Tumen the private post-stations vastly improved. Some of them were better furnished, roomier, and altogether more comfortable than the best of the Government establishments. At the towns and larger villages many of them were hotels, at which one could obtain private sleeping apartments.

But we did not stay to test the quality of the accommodation. With good horses, fair roads, few delays, and only thirty or forty degrees of frost—a temperature quite mild compared with that to which we had accustomed ourselves—sledge travelling was exceptionally enjoyable at this stage of the journey, so long as the snow kept off. But it must be confessed that our two months sleighing had given us something of a surfeit. Neither of us had seen a railway train for years, so there was an added zest in the emotions with which we looked forward to our first glimpse of Tumen, the terminus of the little line which runs through Ekaterinburg and across the Ural Mountains to Perm. It was true that we should have another six hundred miles of sledging on the other side of the Urals, but this would be under rather different conditions, and we looked forward with pleasure to the prospect of getting rid once and for ever of the sledge which had been our home more or less for the past nine weeks. We had been proud of the lumbering old machine at first. It compared very favourably with the sledges we met on the road in the Far Eastern provinces, but the comfortable, roomy, strongly built, handsome sledges which in the West we might have bought new for a less sum than we had paid for this rough old

second-hand vehicle, put us altogether out of concert with it. It had cost us originally seventy roubles, and we had first and last spent seventy-one roubles on it for repairs.

We jogged along merrily, making a better rate of speed than we had ever done before. On one or two days we covered little short of 160 miles in the twenty-four hours; and when, at five o'clock on the morning of February 18, we drew up at the post-station of Tiumen we had travelled 1,452 versts in six days and eighteen hours, making an average of 215 versts, or about 143 miles a day. Since leaving Vladivostok we had covered 7,020 versts, or 4,680 miles.

## CHAPTER XV

## TUMEN TO MOSCOW

English faces—An Englishman among the Samovodes—A railway journey—The road to Irbit—Irbt Fair—The city of a month—Business and pleasure—Natural food preservation—A heavy bill—A sledging steeplechase—Back to Tiumen—A Siberian squire—Mashnitza—Farewell to Tiumen—The Tiumen Perm Railway—Luxurious travelling *versus* speed—Ekaterinburg and its gems—Asia, the Uials, Europe—Perm—Sledging in Europe—A posting monopoly—Snow ploughs—A road surveyor—Tatar caravans—The miseries of Lent—Kazan—Up the Volga—Vasil Suruk—Nizhni Novgorod—A deserted city—Moscow—A retrospect—The death of Mr Uren

SURROUNDED by kindly English faces, listening to the pleasant English tongue, with English books on the bookshelves behind us and English pictures round us on the walls of the cheerful room, nothing but the samovar and tumblers in the place of pot and cups and saucers serve to remind us that we are still in Asiatic Russia. And he must be insular-minded indeed who would prefer to samovar and tumblers the furniture of the English tea-table. We have been but a few short hours in Tiumen, but, like all English-speaking travellers who ever traverse the Siberian highway, we have found our way to the home of the Wai droppers, the English family who for more than twenty

years have been settled in Western Siberia. There are the first English faces we have seen since leaving the Pacific coast. From Russian acquaintances and fellow-travellers, from Danish friends of inexhaustible hospitality, we had received innumerable kindnesses, but yet we had been longing for the sight of English faces and the sound of English voices. It was worth all the hardships and discomforts of the long sledge journey to receive at its end so cordial a welcome from English people, who, however attached they have become to their Siberian home, have lost none of their love for the land of their birth.

To various other enterprises which the Messrs. Waidiopper have carried on with advantage to the prosperity of Trumen, they have lately added a fishery at the mouth of the Taz, which just at the Arctic Circle flows into the Tazovskaya Gulf, a branch of the great Gulf of Obi. Here for months together Mr. Robert Waidiopper, son of Mr. James Waidiopper, one of the original settlers, conducts the fishery among the Samoyedes, wearing Samoyede clothes, performing his journeys on the backs of reindeer, living sometimes on raw fish, encountering such wild snowstorms that three paces from his door his hut is hidden from his sight, seeing no human beings but the half-savage Samoyedes, and altogether undergoing adventures before which our poor little Siberian journey took the dimensions of an infant's crawl.

Trumen is a prosperous town of some nineteen or twenty thousand inhabitants, having an excellent school, several public buildings of goodly exterior, and an infinity of

churches of the regulation pattern. In its market-place a brisk trade was being carried on in carpets and other Central Asian wares, but a resident would doubtless have said that the town was empty, just as London is empty out of the season. For it was the month of the Irbit Fair, and next to the world-famous Jahnmarkt of Nizhni Novgorod this is the most important of all the Russian fairs. Irbit, though within the boundary which divides Russia proper from Siberia, is only some fifteen or eighteen hours' journey from Tiumen, and its fair, we were told, was a sight we should not miss.

Accordingly at five o'clock on Sunday afternoon, February 20, we took our places in the train, and abandoned ourselves for five hours to the unaccustomed luxury of railway travelling. Only one train a day in each direction traverses the Perm-Ekaterinburg-Tiumen line, and as from the eastern terminus this leaves at five o'clock, night-travelling was a necessity. It was not exactly a break-neck speed at which we travelled. Poklevski, our destination so far as the railway was concerned, was only some sixty-nine miles away, but it was close upon ten o'clock when we left the train. Plenty of sledges were, however, waiting about the station doors for passengers bound for the fair, and after a capital supper in the comfortable waiting-room we had soon concluded a bargain by which we were to be conveyed to Irbit, a distance of 112 versts, in four stages, at the rate of four kopeks, or something less than a penny, a verst.

The route was by a short cut across country, and our

journey closely resembled a steeplechase in a sledge. Fortunately we were almost unencumbered with baggage, and for three out of the four stages we travelled in little light wicker sledges into which we could just pack our two pairs of legs. At some parts of the route the yemshik spent almost as much of his time running beside the sledge as he did on his perch, though such violent exercise must have been anything but agreeable in the thick and heavy skins he wore for warmth. But there are angles at which even a Siberian yemshik finds it impossible to keep his seat on the box, and besides this it was frequently necessary for him to throw all his weight on the side of the sledge farthest from him to prevent its turning turtle.

It was ten on Monday morning when we arrived at Irbit. Our first and foremost desire was to find an hotel and get into bed, but this was no easy task. Every hotel in the town was crammed to suffocation. At length, however, we were directed to a lodging-house known as Doma Lukánina, and here we were shown into a small vacant room. It was bare, dirty, and more cheerless than almost any post-station on the high road, but at least it had a wooden bench in it which might do duty for a bed, and a second bench of similar construction was soon forthcoming. The modest rental of 45 roubles, or say 4l 10s, was demanded for this room, but we explained that we intended to remain only a single night, and not for the whole of the fair, and the terms were left for future arrangement.

A two hours' nap on the 'plank bed,' and a light breakfast of tea and biscuits, and then off in search of Mr. Edward

Wardropper, under whose friendly guidance we were introduced to the wonders of a Russian fair. It but is the city of a month. For the rest of the year its shops are empty and its streets are all but deserted. For this one month not only is every shop crammed with the produce of the West and the East, but its wide open spaces too are covered thick with merchandise of every sort and description. Swarms of busy merchants crowded its streets, huge pyramids of tea-chests towered to the sky, and among the multitudinous objects exhibited for sale in the open spaces were mighty church bells. French cafes and German beer-halls drove a roaring trade, and in the evenings the merchants could select from a variety of entertainments to beguile their leisure hours.

The great place of meeting for trades is the bazaar, there in the evening an excellent band was playing, and Tatar, Persian, and Central Asian merchants in their picturesque costumes threaded in and out among the Russians and Siberians, some in the latest fashions of Moscow and Petersburg, and others in their rough dirty travelling shubas and felt boots. The bustle and animation of the vast throng, among which we with difficulty made our way came with a somewhat dazing effect after the many weeks of travelling on the snowy roads, with for hours together the silence only broken by the clatter of the horses' hoofs and the jingling of the sledge bells.

Leaving this busy scene we betook ourselves to the theatre, where a really excellent company was performing in Russian modern comedy, then to the large and well-appointed dining room of a fine hotel. The room was closely packed with mer-

chants, discussing an excellently served supper *à la carte*, while a troupe of guls performed a lively concert. It was four o'clock in the morning when we returned to our cheerless room at the Doma Lukánina, but even then the merry-making for which the traders manage to find time even in this busy month had only just begun to show some signs of languishing.

Breakfasting with M<sup>r</sup> Waidroppe next morning we were treated to a delicious example of natural food preservation in the Siberian winter, in the shape of an excellent dish of salt-water fish, tasting as fresh as if it had been caught that morning, but which, in reality, had been brought 4,000 miles by reindeer and horses from the mouth of the Taz. An hour or two having been pleasantly spent in strolling round the busy town, we prepared at three in the afternoon for the return journey to Poklevski, and called for our bill. Our landlady put in a modest demand for twenty-five roubles, we demurred, and offered three, with an additional forty kopeks for the use of the samovar. The good lady protested, and summoned three male friends to help her to argue the point with us. But the use of a dirty cell, with a table, two chairs, and two wooden benches, for little more than twenty-four hours, still seemed to us rather dear at 2l 10s, and finding argument of no avail we dropped roubles 3 40 into the lady's hand, jumped into our sledge, and bade the yemshik drive away. The apparently impudent attempt at extortion is to be explained by the fact that at fair time in Irbt all bargains are made for the month. It was our fault, it must be admitted, and not that of madame of the Doma Lukánina,



that we declined to stay till the end of the fair. Had we remained we should probably have been charged no more

A repetition of the sludging steepchase for eleven hours, two hours' nap on the seats at the railway station at Poklevski, and five hours more in the train, and we were back at Tiumen. It was the eve of Maslinitza, the feast with which devotees of the Greek Church prepare themselves for



*Boy Tobogganing.*

the rigorous fast of Lent. By the kindly invitation of Mr. Vamsiloff, a hospitable Russian, married to a daughter of the house of Wardroppe, and living in patriarchal style some twenty miles from Ti-

men, we were afforded an interesting and eminently agreeable experience of the manner in which a Siberian country gentleman celebrates this great national feast. Not Mr. Wardle himself could have exceeded in geniality and warmth of welcome our excellent host and hostess. For several days they kept open house, and during almost the whole time the tables remained piled with delicacies in and out of season, together with wines and liqueurs from as far east as Java, and as far west as Spain. In the intervals of feasting there

were music and dancing, indoor games, skating, and above all the katchuska or toboggan, visits to the live stock of the farm, all comfortably housed, and gallops over the country in luxurious sledges. These last, indeed, constitute the orthodox means of celebrating Mashnitsza. The rivers and roads of Siberia, as of Russia, are at this season thronged with sledges gaily bedecked, many of the occupants appearing in masquerade attire, galloping up and down and saluting their friends with seasonable greetings as they pass. On the Neva at Petersburg is, of course, of all others, the place to see the feast of Mashnitsza at its best, and to tell in detail of the humble imitation of it to be seen at Trumen would be futile in view of the descriptions which have so often been given of the gay scene at the Russian capital.

And amid the pleasure-making of the guests at the hall, the villagers were not forgotten. They, too, had their toboggan, but this did not prevent them from careering down the squire's katchuska when his visitors were seeking amusement in other directions. More than once, too, our host was called away to minister to the ailments of some one or other of the dwellers round his country house, for, doctors being scarce, his amateur skill in surgery and medicine was eminently useful and evidently highly appreciated. Everything betokened a well-managed and prosperous farm, and as we sledged back to Trumen we no longer wondered that some of our resident English friends preferred life in Siberia to the struggle for existence at home. Our host was able to show us some samples of English grain which he had obtained direct from its native ground, and with

which he intended to experiment in the soil of Siberia in the coming season

On the tenth day after our first arrival in the town we exchanged farewells with the friends who had made our stay in the border town of Siberia so agreeable, and regretfully left Tumen behind us. The through journey from Tumen to Perm by rail—a distance of some 580 miles—occupies, including a stoppage of three hours at Ekaterinburg, just over forty hours—an average of some fifteen miles an hour. Twenty miles indeed is said to be the maximum rate of speed which the trains are ever allowed to attain. There are fifty-one stations on the line, and as there is but one train a day in each direction, this necessarily stops at all of them. The stations are for some inscrutable reason placed generally some two or three miles from the towns and villages whose names they bear, even when the line runs through them. But there is compensation in the lack of speed, for we are assured that it is no uncommon thing for a passenger to step down from his carriage on to the line when he reaches the point nearest to his home; though the story of a passenger who dropped his hat out of a carriage window halfway between two stations, got out, recovered it, and caught the train again, is doubtless an exaggeration. Apart from speed, however, it is a model line. The seats were convertible into excellent beds at night, and the carriages were well warmed and lighted, and fitted with every comfort. Many of the railway stations, too, were quite stately erections, with large and finely decorated dining-rooms in which excellent meals were served, with

ample time allowed to eat them, and a code of bell signals which relieved one of all fear of being left behind

A few hours after taking our seats in the train, we bade farewell to Siberia. But we were not yet out of Asia, for the boundary of the two continents does not coincide with that which separates Siberia from the home provinces of Russia. Ekaterinburg, at which we arrived at the end of some sixteen hours, and at which we made a halt of a day, is in the province of Perm. It is a flourishing city of some thirty-five or forty thousand inhabitants, far more European than Asiatic in its type, and owing its prosperity mainly to the marbles and precious stones found in those parts of the Ural Mountains on the slopes of which Ekaterinburg stands. The topaz, the amethyst, and the alexandrite, the curious stone which shows like the emerald by day and the ruby by night, are to be had here in abundance at moderate prices, and pretty objects carved in malachite, lapis lazuli, and numerous other varieties of beautiful minerals are on sale everywhere.

Travelling in company with our friend from Khabarovka, Mr. Doing, who had parted from his time-pressed fellow-traveller and cast in his lot with ours, we left Ekaterinburg by rail at midday on March 2, and soon after nightfall drew up at a little station bearing the significant title of 'Asiatiskaya'. Half an hour later we were at 'Uralskaya,' and when at the end of yet another half-hour we arrived at 'Evropeiskaya' we knew we had at length reached our own continent. We were deprived of the pleasure which used to be enjoyed by travellers before

the railroad was built, of sitting on the stone which divides the two continents, and dangling a leg in each, but the three stations served to remind us of the important point in our journey at which we had arrived.

At the city of Perm, a Russian provincial capital, offering no particular attractions to the sightseer, we stayed but a single day. Our arrangements for our last stage of sledging were soon completed. Having hired for the journey the roomiest *povoska* we could find, and having packed our belongings within it, and our three selves on our belongings—a task which, in our thick furs, was not an easy one—we started off at ten o'clock on the morning of March 1, along the road to Kazan.

To describe in detail the journey from Perm to Nizhni Novgorod would be only to repeat much of what has been said with regard to sledging in Siberia. The posting here on this European Russian route is not managed directly by the Government, but is let to a contractor, who has a monopoly of the carriage of passengers, and who charges four kopeks per verst per horse, against three kopeks in Eastern Siberia and one and a half in Western. Like all monopolies, it works badly. The roads, it is true, are better than the average Siberian roads, but they are bad enough at that. The horses, though plentiful, compare very ill with most of the Siberian animals, and the *yemshiks* do not exert themselves nearly as much to make good speed. One advantage of the system is that the traveller can pay his through fare in advance, instead of making a separate payment at each station on the route.

The winter was now fast dying. Once for a few hours the temperature actually rose above the freezing-point, and damp lumps of half-thawed dirty snow were flung in our faces by the horses' hoofs. For the most part, however, snow continued to fall, and by the sides of the road it lay at a greater depth than we had as yet seen it throughout our journey. For the first time, too, we saw snow ploughs at work—rough devices for pushing the snow to the sides of the road. At Debes, some hundred and twenty miles from Perm, we met a party of officials consisting of the contractor for this private post, the Government Inspector of Roads, and the Inspector of Telegraphs. We hoped for the benefit of future travellers that the result of the visit of inspection would be an improvement in the posting service, but the fact that the Government Inspector was accompanied throughout his journey by the man on the performance of whose contract he would have to report was not an altogether hopeful sign. We heard some amusing stories of the devices resorted to by peasants to evade the contractor's monopoly of carrying passengers. A favourite dodge used to be to take a horse out from the troika before reaching a post-station, and to go slowly past the station with two horses, or only one, as if bound only for some neighbouring village, the detached horse following at a safe distance behind, and being reharnessed a verst or so beyond.

All night and all day, long caravans of freight-sledges, many of them in charge of Tatar drivers, met and passed us on the road, and at many of the villages the Tatar

population appeared to be far more numerous than the Russians. The freight traffic was, however, nothing like as great as that between Irkutsk and Tomsk. Horses were always in waiting at the stations, and our stoppages for meals were brief, for the simple reason that there was rarely anything eatable to be obtained. We had left Perm with our provision-bag un replenished, trusting confidently to the resources of the numerous Russian towns and villages through which we knew we should pass. But we had reckoned without allowing for the piety of the Russian villagers. It was Lent. For two days in succession, with keenly whetted appetites we arrived at a village post-station, to find no food procurable except cold, muddy fresh-water fish, half-raw and steeped in vinegar, with, as an alternative, eggs which the natural refrigerator of a Russian winter had not succeeded in preserving in quite their pristine purity. A very few successive days of the Lenten fast as observed by the Eastern Church might well have done more than a hundred Protestant sermons to confirm us in the faith of our fathers. But, short as were our stoppages, and few our delays, we failed to maintain an average speed of more than a hundred and eighty miles a day, reaching the ancient university city of Kazan—a distance of 385 miles from Perm—in a little under seventy-eight hours.

There is much to interest the visitor in the old Tatar city of Kazan, with its fortress or kremlin, not to be compared of course with the marvellous Kremlin of Moscow, but still picturesque enough. We remained, however, but a day and a half, during which time it snowed and blew

great guns incessantly. It was not under the most favourable circumstances, therefore, that we viewed the beauties and objects of interest in the town. We found compensation, however, in the luxury of a good hotel—the Volga-Kama, named after the two rivers near the junction of which the city of Kazan stands. There were actually sheets upon the beds in which we slept—a luxury which we had not enjoyed, except during our visit to Mr. Vamfiloff, since leaving the Pacific coast.

On the morning of Wednesday, March 9, we once more ensconced ourselves in our sledge with the comforting reflection that we had now entered on the very last stage of our long sledge journey. From Kazan to Nizhni Novgorod the winter road runs almost continuously along the frozen waters of the Volga, only occasionally ascending the steep banks to change horses at a post-station, or sometimes cutting across a bend of the river. 'The waters of the Volga river system,' Mr Kennan tells us, 'annually float nearly five million tons of merchandise, and furnish employment to seven thousand vessels, and nearly two hundred thousand boatmen.' And for 'annually' he might with equal truth have said 'in seven months.' For during the rest of the year the river is a sheet of ice, and the only signs of this vast commerce to be seen are the steamers and sailing vessels lying frozen in by the shores. A narrow winding way along the ice forms the sledging road, and all the rest of the broad sheet of water is unbroken snow. But along this sledge road there was plenty of traffic, and the numerous villages on the banks relieved the monotony



of the scene. In the afternoon of the second day from Kazan we reached the little town of Vasil-Sursk, and found it gaily decked with the national colours in commemoration of the crowning of Alexander Alexandrovich in 1881. At a little hotel connected with the post-station we defied Lent and did honour to his Majesty in an excellent dinner, and shortly before noon on the following day the spires and domes of Nizhni Novgorod loomed into sight.

The city presented a very beautiful appearance from the river, and the fair promise was not belied. On our left as we rattled up the waters of the Oka River rose the old town, with the kremlin in its midst, and innumerable domed churches glittering in the sunlight, among them the great cathedral of Alexander Nevski. Commissioned to take us to a good hotel, our yemshuk dashed up the bank to the right, and we were soon making our way through street after street of empty, shuttered shops. For we were in the midst of the fair town of Nizhni Novgorod, the town which for nine months of the year is a desert, and for the remaining three presents an aspect of commercial activity before which the busy scene we had witnessed at Irbit pales into comparative insignificance. Presently we pulled up at the door of an hotel of shabby exterior, and of which the dirty interior more than fulfilled its outward promise. Reviving our yemshuk, we reseated ourselves in our sledge, recrossed the Oka to the old town, and were soon quartered in a comfortable hostelry.

Our sledge journey was at an end. Since leaving Vladivostok we had travelled 5,407 miles by sledge, and 84

by tarantas. We had sat behind nearly 1,100 horses, and had changed horses at 357 posting stations. Including a stay of more than a week at Tiumen, and several shorter periods of rest in the Siberian towns through which we had passed, we had occupied just twelve weeks in the journey, and during this time we had spent close upon fifty nights in the open air, sheltered only by the hood of our open-fronted sledge. The rest of our journey was easy. The railway and the Calais-Dover steamers now connected us directly with London. Within two days we were inspecting the glories of Moscow under the friendly guidance of Mr Emery, an American merchant of the Amur River, who by a strange coincidence happened to be staying in Moscow at the very hotel to which chance directed our steps. We had letters to Mr Emery from friends in China and in England, but that gentleman had left Vladivostok for England a few days before us. Mr Emery is an old Siberian traveller. He has many times sledged across the Asiatic continent, and has made one of the fastest sledge journeys on record from Moscow to Irkutsk. But he candidly admits that he prefers the water now, and hopes never to go by road again. He had come by steamer from his home at Nikolaevsk, to Vladivostok, and thence by steamer again to Odessa, and by the time of his return to his home in the East, the ports of Siberia would again be open to navigation.

We were now within three days' reach of home, and could look back upon our long wintry journey and endeavour to make up our minds whether it had been worth the doing. More than one traveller who has made part of the

same trip in the months of frost and snow has recorded, for the benefit of those who might feel disposed to follow in his footsteps, his strong opinion that the places of interest to be seen, the pleasure to be derived, and the knowledge to be acquired on such a journey are wholly insufficient to compensate one for its hardships, its discomforts, and its monotony. Did our experience confirm their testimony? It must be confessed that there is much to be said for their view, but, had it not been for one sad result of our expedition, I should unhesitatingly have pronounced against it. That much of the journey was monotonous, readers of this volume will not be very strongly disposed to deny. That there were times during the later weeks when we heartily wished ourselves at our journey's end, is frankly admitted. But there is a pleasure in sledging through those vast solitudes, in the arrival at strange towns, in the thousand and one incidents of the journey, of which one does not easily tire; and if one has a fairly vigorous constitution one can safely disregard and, with the cold-defying appliances to be had in abundance, even manage to enjoy, the rigours of the climate.

But unfortunately Mr Ulen was not endowed with a constitution fit for such an enterprise. His spirit was indomitable. It was he who had conceived the project of the journey, and no warnings of friends would induce him to abandon it. He knew his health was feeble, but he did not know, what after events proved to be the case, that he had in him the germs of consumption. He had been advised, too, that the Siberian climate would in all likelihood benefit his health rather than endanger it, and for a time it seemed

that this opinion would be justified. Though the intense cold of the early part of the journey he appeared even to gain in strength and vigour, and it was not till we had nearly reached the borders of Europe that his health began to give way. Sledging up the Volga, he grew day by day weaker and more unfit for travelling, but his spirit never failed him, even when there came upon him at length the shock of knowing that in all human probability he would reach home only to die. One could not possibly have had a pleasanter companion, one more cheerful under trying circumstances, or one gifted with a readier wit in overcoming the petty difficulties which encountered one at every turn on such a journey. He had left England scarcely more than a boy, and after ten years spent in Egypt and China, he was returning for the first time to spend a well-earned holiday with his family at home. Often as we sat discussing our half-thawed viands in the lonely post-stations he would dwell on the coming pleasures of his visit to his native land, and plan out future voyages—a favourite journey, which he would certainly have ventured if his life had been spared, being by the Caspian Sea, through Persia to India, and so onward to the Far East. His sad fate has cast a gloom upon the author's memories of an experience the incidents of which it would otherwise be an unmixed pleasure to recall.



